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ABSTRACT

The goals of education for the next century require a new conception of accountability, one that seeks to create responsible and responsive schools. This volume tries to outline such a conception of learner-centered accountability, and show how it looks in action in real schools. The first chapter provides a conceptual overview of a learner-centered model of accountability, and the following chapters describe how features of this model look in operation in four urban schools, two elementary schools and two secondary schools in New York City, that are extraordinarily successful with students. The following chapters are summaries of more extensive cases to be published under separate cover: (1) "Accountability and the Changing Context of Teaching" (Linda Darling-Hammond and Jon Snyder); (2) "Learner-Centered Accountability in Action: The Brooklyn New School" (Jon Snyder and Linda Darling-Hammond); (3) "Professional Accountability in the Bronx New School" (Maritza B. Macdonald and Jon Snyder); (4) "The Development of Authentic Assessment at Central Park East Secondary School" (Jacqueline Ancess, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Lynne Einbender); and (5) "Restructuring for Learner-Centered Accountability at University Heights High School" (A. Lin Goodwin). (Contains 66 references.) (SLD)

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Creating Learner-Centered Accountability

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May 1993

Preface

The school restructuring movement has called attention to the need to find new ways to organize schools so that they are genuinely accountable for their students and to their communities. The kinds of accountability that are sought are different from the forms that have characterized bureaucratized schools throughout much of this century -- that is, accountability for ensuring that procedures are followed and directives are complied with. Instead, educational reformers want to create schools that are accountable for ensuring that all students learn at high levels and that no students "fall through the cracks." We call these forms of accountability *learner-centered*, since they seek to focus on the needs and interests of learners for appropriate and supportive forms of teaching rather than on the demands of bureaucracies for standardized forms of schooling.

We argue that the goals of education for the twenty-first century -- education that ensures learning rather than merely delivering instruction -- also demand new roles for teachers, new approaches to school organization, and new policy structures that enact a different conception of accountability, a conception that seeks to create responsible and responsive schools. In this volume, we try to outline what such a conception of learner-centered accountability might entail and what it looks like in action in real schools that are actively struggling with this mission.

In the first chapter, we provide a conceptual overview of a learner-centered model of accountability, describing the implications for educational governance, policy, school management, and teaching practice. In the following chapters, we describe how various features of this model look in operation in a set of four urban schools that are extraordinarily successful with students and have been involved for some time in developing systems and approaches within their schools to support knowledgeable, learner-centered practices, schoolwide inquiry and self-assessment, and strong connections to parents and community.

These two elementary and two secondary schools in New York City -- the Brooklyn New School, the Bronx New School, Central Park East Secondary School, and University Heights High School -- are participating in a research-and-development project at the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching that is seeking to document and understand how and why central city schools that serve historically underserved students succeed in their mission. The "Accountability in Action" project has involved NCREST staff and school faculties in collectively identifying and documenting practices that support students and teachers in their learning and schools in their efforts to be responsive to their communities. Some of the schools have also engaged in self-studies that enable teachers and other staff to examine their internal approaches to accountability from a

student centered lens.

The papers published here are summaries of more extensive cases to be published under separate cover. They were presented in nearly this form at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in April 1992. The initial two chapters are adapted from a single chapter, "Reframing Accountability: Creating Learner-Centered Schools," published in 1992, in *The Changing Contexts of Teaching: the Ninety-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*. We are grateful to NSSE for granting us permission to reprint the chapter and to the faculties, students, and parents in these schools for enabling us to better understand how they think and work together in the creation of learning communities.

The publication of these papers would not have been possible without the cooperation of the school staff and students at the Brooklyn New School, the Bronx New School, Central Park East Secondary School, and University Heights High School. We thank them all for giving of their time and energy so generously, and for their willingness to share with us their vision of what true learner-centered schools can be.

We also wish to thank NCREST communications director Diane Harrington and editors Alice Weaver and Elizabeth Lesnick for their invaluable assistance in producing this volume.

Linda Darling-Hammond

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Chapter 1

Accountability and the Changing Context of Teaching

Linda Darling-Hammond
Jon Snyder

Major changes in American society are producing a radically different mission for schools, requiring new conceptions of accountability tied to new roles for teachers. Social requirements are pressing for forms of schooling and teaching that will ensure high levels of student learning for all, rather than the traditional school outcomes of success for some and failure for many others. This means that schools must find ways to reach diverse learners effectively, rather than being accountable merely for "offering education" or "delivering instruction," regardless of the outcomes.

At the crux of this new school mission is a changed conception of teaching. In a learner-centered view of schooling, the teacher is responsible not merely for "covering the curriculum" but for connecting with students in ways that actively help them to construct and use their own knowledge. If all students are to learn well, teachers must be able to meet them on their own terms, at their own starting points, with a wide range of strategies to support their success.

These conceptions, in turn, point to new approaches for developing and maintaining school accountability. In contrast to the bureaucratic mechanisms promulgated over many decades to enforce standardization, the challenge is to create accountability mechanisms that will support the nonstandardized, individually appropriate teaching strategies needed to produce success for diverse learners. In lieu of hierarchical decision making resting on routinized conceptions of teaching and learning, accountability will need to be based on a greatly enriched capacity for knowledgeable and responsible decision making on the part of teachers. This chapter explores the possibilities for a learner-centered conception of accountability grounded in a strengthened profession of teaching.

The Social Context for a New Schooling Mission

The 1980s launched the most sustained and far-reaching set of efforts to "reform" American elementary and secondary education since the formation of the common school

nearly a century earlier. Spurred by massive changes in the nation's economy and social fabric, these initiatives have involved unlikely -- indeed previously unthinkable -- alliances between chief executive officers of major U.S. corporations, heads of teachers' unions, state governors, and progressive educators in a variety of roles.

The sense of reformers is that American public schools designed for the needs of the nineteenth century will not meet the demands of the twenty-first. Their sense of urgency comes from the convergence of a number of trends that are changing society in profound ways. In brief sketch, these include:

- A rapidly changing industrial base and the prospective loss of U.S. economic dominance in international markets.
- Major demographic shifts, including a substantial growth in the population over age 65 that will need to be supported by a shrinking number of young people entering the work force. More of these young workers are -- and will increasingly be -- the children of immigrants, poor families, and minorities.
- Continuing underperformance of the educational system for these same young people, who by the end of the 1990s will comprise 40 percent of the public school population and over a third of the entering work force.
- Disappointing outcomes for the educational system more generally. For example:
 - The U.S. ranks near the very bottom of all industrialized countries on international assessments of students' knowledge of mathematics and science.
 - National assessments continue to show declines in students' problem-solving skills and critical thinking abilities.
 - Dropout rates hover at 25 percent for all U.S. students and reach 50 percent for minority youth in central cities, for whom unemployment rates remain almost that high as well.

These concerns occur against a backdrop of dramatic economic shifts as our society moves from a manufacturing economy to a technologically based information economy. Whereas in 1900 about half the nation's jobs required low-skilled or unskilled labor, today fewer than 10 percent do. And while fewer than 10 percent of jobs at the beginning of the century were professional or technical jobs requiring higher education, more than half of the new jobs created in this decade will require education beyond high school; 90 percent will require at least a high school education (Hudson Institute, 1987). The technological explosion has hastened new methods of organization for business and industry that demand better-educated, more thoughtful workers for virtually all kinds of jobs (Drucker, 1986).

Thus, the life chances of students whom schools have failed grow increasingly dim. A male high school dropout in 1986, for example, had only one chance in three of being employed full-time, half the odds of 20 years earlier. If employed, he earned only \$6,700 a year, about half of what a high school dropout earned in 1973 (Grant Foundation, 1988). Lack of education is also linked to crime and delinquency. More than half the adult prison population is functionally illiterate, and nearly 40 percent of adjudicated juvenile delinquents have treatable learning disabilities that were not diagnosed in the schools.

In addition, the United States is entering a period of labor shortage, while the number of older Americans is growing. In the 1950s the ratio of active workers to Social Security beneficiaries was 10 to 1. Soon that ratio will be 3 to 1. If one-third of those three are "unemployable," not only will we have a growing class of permanently impoverished Americans, but the social contract that supports the promises between generations of Americans will collapse (Darling-Hammond, 1989). In brief, there is a growing consensus that the United States cannot maintain its democratic foundations or its standard of living unless all students are much better educated. Students who have traditionally been allowed to fail must be helped to succeed; many more must become not just minimally schooled but highly proficient and inventive. This consensus creates a new mission for schools and teachers and entirely new approaches to accountability.

Creating Accountability for Student Learning

Ideas about how to achieve accountability are in a state of flux. In recent years, the term *accountability* has been considered nearly synonymous with mandates for student testing and standard setting. The idea of many legislated accountability initiatives is to bring rapid order to the educational system by setting high goals and making students, teachers, and administrators responsible for meeting them.

We argue, however, that accountability requires much more than measuring narrowly defined student outcomes. An accountability system is a set of commitments, policies, and practices designed to create responsible and responsive education. Each aspect of an accountable school's operations should aim to:

- heighten the probability that good practices will occur for students;
- reduce the likelihood that harmful practices will occur;
- provide internal self-correctives in the system to identify, diagnose, and change courses of action that are harmful or ineffective.

Accountability is achieved when a school system's policies and operating practices work both to provide a nurturing and educational school experience and to address problems as they occur. Assessment data are helpful in this regard, to the extent that they provide relevant, valid, timely, and useful information about how individual students are doing and how schools are serving them. But data of this kind are only one small element of a fully functioning accountability system.

Accountability encompasses how a school or school system hires, evaluates, and supports its staff; how it relates to students and parents; how it manages its daily affairs; how it makes decisions; how it ensures that the best available knowledge will be acquired and used; how it generates new knowledge; how it evaluates its own functioning as well as student progress; how it tackles problems; and how it provides incentives for continual improvement.

Accountable schools establish policies and practices in all of these areas that are likely to produce responsible and responsive education for their students. Their accountability systems enable them to set goals or standards and to diagnose how they are doing; establish processes by which these standards are likely to be achieved or maintained; and include ways of correcting problems when they arise.

Types of Educational Accountability

In education, as in other enterprises in our society, at least five types of accountability mechanisms exist alongside each other:

- **Political accountability.** Legislators and school board members, for example, must regularly stand for election.
- **Legal accountability.** Citizens can ask the courts to hear complaints about the public schools' violation of laws, for example, those regarding desegregation or provision of appropriate services to a handicapped student.
- **Bureaucratic accountability.** District and state education offices promulgate rules and regulations intended to ensure that school activities meet standards and follow set procedures.
- **Professional accountability.** Teachers and other school staff must acquire specialized knowledge, pass certification exams, and uphold professional standards of practice.

- **Market accountability.** Parents and students may choose the courses or schools they believe are most appropriate. They may also be involved in other, more direct means of participating in school decision making.

All of these accountability mechanisms have their strengths and weaknesses, and each is more or less appropriate for certain goals. Political mechanisms can help establish general policy directions, but they do not allow citizens to judge each decision by elected officials and they do not necessarily secure the rights of minorities. Legal mechanisms are useful in establishing and defending rights, but not everything is subject to court action and not all citizens have ready access to the courts.

Bureaucratic mechanisms are appropriate when standard procedures will produce desired outcomes, but they can be counterproductive when, as in the instance of schools, clients have unique and different needs. Professional mechanisms are important when, as in teaching, services require complex knowledge and decision making to meet clients' individual needs. These mechanisms, however, do not always take competing public goals (e.g., cost containment) into account. Market mechanisms are helpful when consumer preferences vary widely and the state has no direct interest in controlling choice, but they do not ensure that all citizens will have access to services of the same quality.

Because of these limits, no single form of accountability operates alone in any major area of public life. The choice of accountability tools and the balance among different forms of accountability are constantly shifting as problems emerge, as social goals change, and as new circumstances arise. In education, the power of electoral accountability, exemplified in the authority of school boards, has waxed and waned over the past 20 years in relation to that of appointed officials. In the same period, legal forms of accountability have grown, as court cases have been used to settle educational policy; and bureaucratic forms of accountability have expanded through increased policy making at the district and state levels.

Recently, market accountability, the least used form, has been expanded somewhat through the creation of magnet schools or schools of choice. Finally, based on an expanding knowledge base and efforts to create more meaningful standards of practice, professional accountability is gaining currency as a way to improve teaching. Nevertheless, among these forms, the use of bureaucratic and legal accountability mechanisms now outweighs all others -- and some experts suggest that these two forms may have overextended their reach, now hindering the very aims they are designed to further.

Bureaucratic, professional, political, and market accountability tools are all currently being proposed as strategies for school improvement. The trade-offs and tensions among these approaches are part of the balancing act that must occur in striving for a better combination of methods to promote accountability. The key question is which combination of approaches is most likely to actually *strengthen* schools' and teachers' capacities to meet student needs rather than merely measuring and monitoring what they do.

Bureaucratic Accountability

The intention of bureaucratic accountability is to ensure equal education through the development of uniform, standardized procedures. The view underlying this approach to school management is as follows: Schools are agents of government to be administered by hierarchical decision making. Policies are made at the top of the system and handed down to administrators who translate them into rules and procedures. Teachers follow these rules and procedures (class schedules, curriculum guides, textbooks, rules for promotion and assignment of students, etc.), and students are processed according to them.

Bureaucratic accountability offers the hope of finding the "one best system," codified by law and specified by regulations, by which all students may be educated. When applied directly to teaching practices, bureaucratic forms of accountability assume that:

- Students are standardized so that they will respond in identical and predictable ways to the "treatments" devised by policy makers and their principle agents.
- Sufficient knowledge of which treatments to prescribe is both available and generalizable to all educational circumstances.
- This knowledge can be translated into standardized rules for practice, which, in turn, can be maintained through regulatory and inspection systems.
- Administrators and teachers can and will faithfully implement the prescriptions for practice.

The validity of these assumptions, though, is questionable. Research and the wisdom of practice have demonstrated that student diversity demands responsive, reciprocal teaching practices. In order for individual schoolchildren to be treated equally and appropriately, they must be treated differently in response to their talents, interests, experiences, and approaches to learning (Sirotnik and Goodlad, 1988; Sykes, 1983; Schlechty, 1989; Darling-Hammond, 1989; Likert and Likert, 1976; Shulman, 1983; Holmes Group, 1986; 1990; Kerr, 1983; Wise and Darling-Hammond, 1987). The bureaucratic strategy of using mandates and monitoring to ensure standard practice has neither helped teachers meet the needs of diverse students nor attracted and held highly trained, talented, and committed teachers in the numbers required (Shulman, 1983; Kerr, 1983; McNeil, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 1986; 1990; Zumwalt, 1988; Glickman, 1990).

In the bureaucratic model, teachers are held accountable for implementing curricular and testing policies, most often prescribed at the district and state levels, whether or not the prescriptions are appropriate in particular instances for particular students. Their own knowledge about learning theory and pedagogy may actually be a liability if it conflicts with these policies. In fact, current knowledge about learning suggests that this will frequently occur, since students learn in different ways and at different rates under different

circumstances, and effective teaching strategies must be flexible, adaptive, and nonuniform to meet these needs.

The bureaucratic model does not seek to ensure that teachers are highly knowledgeable, however, since it presumes that many important decisions will be made by others in the hierarchy and handed down to teachers in packaged form. In this system, teachers cannot be held accountable for meeting the individual needs of their students; they can only be held accountable for following standard operating procedures.

In addition, the assumption that rules for practice can be enforced through regulatory and inspection systems leads to a massive investment in monitoring that, given the impossibility of its task, is an expensive exercise in futility. The increased use of bureaucratic accountability mechanisms has produced layer on layer of "overseers" responsible not to children or families but to ensuring that rules are followed. Throughout the last three decades, the rate of growth in administrative positions has far outstripped the growth in the number of teachers employed by schools. By 1986, school districts employed approximately one administrative staff person for every 2.5 teachers and spent only 38 percent of their total budgets on teacher salaries (Darling-Hammond, 1990). Having produced a system in which one out of every two educational dollars is now spent outside the classroom, bureaucratic accountability tools have reduced investments in the actual activities of teaching and learning.

Another aspect of bureaucratic monitoring is the remote control of teaching through heavy emphasis on the production of standardized test scores. Given the nature of current norm-referenced, multiple-choice basic skills tests, focusing on test scores as the primary outcome of schooling inhibits teaching aimed at higher-order skills and the development of genuine performance abilities (National Research Council, 1982; Resnick, 1987; Koretz, 1988; Boyer, 1983; Goodlad, 1984; Darling-Hammond and Wise, 1985). Current tests are based on an outmoded theory of learning as the accumulation of tiny bits of information, a view compatible with bureaucratic efforts to break tasks up into their smallest discrete parts as the basis for organizing work and learning. Bussis explains how early reading instruction, now aimed at the production of good scores on basic skills tests rather than the development of good readers, actually impedes students' efforts at learning to read:

Instructional programs in U.S. schools focus on "essential" reading skills; yet these skills have no demonstrable relationship to learning how to read books, and they impose definitions of reading and standards of reading progress that are contrary to common sense. . . . Presenting children with written language in piecemeal fashion . . . actually imposes formidable burdens on the learner (1982, p. 239).

The end result can be that both teachers and students fail to develop the skills they need to engage in productive teaching and learning together. "Because multiple choice testing leads to multiple choice teaching, the methods that teachers have in their arsenal

become reduced, and teaching work is deskilled. . . . Over time and with increased testing stakes, teaching becomes more testlike" (Smith, 1991, p. 10).

In addition to missed opportunities for productive learning, this kind of monitoring system poses heavy costs in time and money. An estimated 20 million school days are spent each year by students just taking tests (Paris, Lawton, Turner, and Roth, 1991). Smith (1991) found in one state that 100 hours per classroom were devoted to preparing for and recovering from state-mandated criterion-referenced tests. The National Commission on Testing and Public Policy (1990) estimates that testing and related costs present taxpayers with a bill of nearly half a billion dollars annually.

These costs might be justified if the use of the tests improved teaching and learning. Current evidence suggests they do not. Looking at two decades of research, officials of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the National Research Council, and the National Councils of Teachers of English and Mathematics, among others, have attributed the decline in students' performance on problem-solving and critical-thinking tasks to schools' overemphasis on multiple-choice tests of basic skills (Darling-Hammond, 1991). While offering certain superficial comforts, the current overreliance on bureaucratic forms of accountability appears to be imposing costs that are greater than the benefits secured for education.

Professional Accountability

Professional accountability starts from very different assumptions. It assumes that, since decisions about different clients' needs are too complex and individualistic to be prescribed from afar, the work must be structured to ensure that practitioners will be able to make responsible decisions. It aims to ensure professional competence through rigorous preparation, certification, and selection and evaluation of practitioners, as well as continuous peer review. It requires that educators make decisions on the basis of the best available professional knowledge; it also requires that they pledge their first commitment to the welfare of the client. Thus, rather than encouraging teaching that is procedure-oriented and rule-based, professional accountability seeks to create practices that are *client-oriented* and *knowledge-based*.

In short, professional models propose to meet the obligation of accountability by ensuring that:

- All individuals permitted to practice are adequately prepared to do so responsibly.
- Existing knowledge concerning best practices will be used, and practitioners, individually and collectively, will continually seek to discover new knowledge and increasingly responsible courses of action.

- Practitioners will pledge their first and primary commitment to the welfare of the client.

Professional accountability acknowledges that, since children are not standardized, it is unlikely that uniform prescriptions for practice can be effective across vastly differing contexts for learning. To treat each student differently yet equally is a challenging responsibility for the teacher. As Shulman states:

The teacher remains the key. The literature on effective schools is meaningless, debates over educational policy are moot, if the primary agents of instruction are incapable of performing their functions well. No microcomputer will replace them, no television system will clone and distribute them, no scripted lessons will direct and control them, no voucher system will bypass them (1983, p. 504).

Since only teachers can manage the complex decisions of classroom life, they must be able to stay abreast of and apply their constantly expanding knowledge of how children learn while coping with the ethical dilemmas resulting from conflicts between legitimate educational goals. Ethics, knowledge, and the wisdom required to use knowledge ethically can neither be generated nor prescribed from afar.

Clearly, the quality of staff hired and retained is a key component of professional accountability. Rather than aiming to regulate practice, this model assumes that the most important thing parents and students have a right to expect from their schools is that the persons charged with the care of children will be highly knowledgeable, competent, and committed. Rather than investing in better regulations, professional accountability seeks to invest in better teachers, supporting their preparation and their ongoing professional growth. Thus, a professional accountability system must pay particular attention to personnel policies governing the preparation, hiring, and evaluation of teachers and other staff, the support given to their ongoing learning, and the assessment vehicles that exist for evaluating classroom and school practices as well as student progress.

To be successful, professional accountability requires (a) teacher preparation and socialization aimed at knowledgeable and ethical teaching, (b) the establishment and transmittal of standards for practice, and (c) school structures that provide for consultation and collaboration.

Preparation and socialization. For educators to make the intellectual and ethical decisions inherent in professional accountability, they must have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will support responsible decision making. They must also work under fewer rules about what is taught, when, and how, so that decisions can be made in response to students rather than in response to regulations.

This is the chicken-and-egg dilemma. Teachers cannot teach responsively unless regulations requiring uniform (hence frequently inappropriate) practices are removed. Regulations cannot be decreased unless teachers can be trusted to make responsible decisions. At the same time, knowledgeable and ethical individuals will not suddenly and magically populate all classrooms without changes in the policies and conditions that currently produce an uneven teaching force.

Professional accountability will require changes in the attractions to teaching, so that a steady supply of talented recruits is available; in the standards for teacher licensure, so that they better reflect a knowledge base appropriate to learner-centered practice; in schools, in teacher education institutions, and in the nature of the relationship between the two, so that they provide and support the acquisition of skills and dispositions suited to student-centered, reflective teaching (Haberman, 1971; DeBevoise, 1986; Lieberman, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 1988).

The systematic and continuous improvement of the quality of education cannot occur until education becomes a progressive profession rather than a tradition-based craft. And education cannot become a progressive profession until those who prepare educators and those who practice in the field are bound by a common culture (Schlechty and Whitford, 1988, p. 203).

The transmission and enforcement of professional norms of continual learning, reflection, and concern with the multiple effects of one's actions on others "require a certain convergence of knowledge, view, and purpose among those who set and enforce standards, those who train practitioners, and those who practice" (Darling-Hammond, 1988, p. 68). Within a professional accountability framework, the preparation and socialization of teachers must become the responsibility of the educational establishment as a whole -- including schools, universities, districts, and unions. Throughout the course of preservice preparation, induction into teaching, and ongoing professional development, teachers should be engaged in research, inquiry, and reflection as well as the acquisition of knowledge about learners and learning, curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching (Holmes Group, 1986, 1990; Goodlad, 1988).

Standards for practice. Professions seek to guarantee the competence of members in exchange for the freedom to control their own work structure and the responsibility to establish and uphold standards of practice. Professional autonomy does not establish a right to practice in any way one pleases. On the contrary, it commits members of a profession to practice in ways that are collectively determined to be safe and defensible.

The application of standards of practice rests on the appropriateness of particular approaches to the needs of students and the goals of instruction. Thus the exercise of professional standards of practice will often contradict the standardized practice required by some bureaucratic mechanisms. A professionally responsible teacher may decide that some or all students would be better taught using books other than a mandated text that is poorly constructed, at the wrong reading level, or biased in its depiction of certain racial, ethnic, or

cultural groups. The teacher may be aware that the learning styles of some students would be better addressed by one set of teaching methods or materials than another prescribed for general use. This teacher would insist, in line with professional knowledge about assessment, that no decision about any student be made solely on the basis of a single test score or other standardized measure.

The potential benefit of professional accountability is a focus on the appropriateness of decisions for students' needs. The potential pitfall is that, if professional standards are not rigorously enforced for preparation and ongoing practice, educators' individually oriented decisions may become idiosyncratic rather than well-grounded in professional knowledge and ethics. Thus, the enforcement of standards through vehicles like peer review of practice and ongoing evaluation of individual and collective work is critical to the effectiveness of professional accountability strategies.

School structures for consultation and collaboration. Some aspects of professional accountability focus on the individual teacher. But without institutional changes in schools to support appropriate practices, such practices wither and the individuals thus prepared either succumb to environmental pressures or desert teaching as a career. Chief among required institutional changes are supports to ensure that teachers have the skills needed to accept the responsibilities required by learner-centered practice and the collegial time needed to develop the shared norms and values that support professional practice and effective schooling.

A major aspect of school accountability is the effort to establish an inquiry ethic and a commitment to collective problem solving that will permeate the school. Such an ethos must be supported by methods for continually evaluating what is going on, asking not just *what* is occurring but also *why* it is happening and *whether* existing practices are accomplishing what the school community wants to accomplish. These questions should not be raised only once or twice a year, when the students are tested or the annual needs-assessment form is filled out. They should be raised in every faculty and team meeting, on every occasion when faculty and students are striving to meet their goals, at every juncture when any kind of stock-taking occurs.

In some rare schools, this kind of collective questioning and reflection is frequent. In others, it rarely occurs. Teacher isolation has worked against collective accountability, while centralized planning, decision making, and evaluation have often removed occasions as well as incentives for this kind of activity at the school level.

Yet if schools are to become more responsive and open to change, they must find ways -- as other professional organizations do -- to make evaluation and assessment part of their everyday lives. Just as hospitals have standing committees of staff that meet regularly to discuss the effectiveness of various aspects of the hospital's functioning (surgery, pathology, epidemiology, etc.), so schools must have regular occasions for examining their practices. And just as lawyers, doctors, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals use case conferences and other forms of consultation as opportunities to share

knowledge and solve problems on behalf of their clients, so teachers must have opportunities to profit from their colleagues' knowledge and perspectives on behalf of their students.

School-level accountability requires both kinds of mechanisms. The first type of evaluation, a kind of peer review of practice, could take many different forms. Standing committees, such as those used in hospitals, could meet regularly to review practices in different areas -- parent-school relations, student grading and promotion policies, academic progress, the quality of particular programs or curricula, the organization of instruction, and so on. Or ad hoc committees might be formed to work on special issues. Faculty meetings might be used to investigate curricular strategies and other matters within and across departments or grade levels. These regular evaluation activities would create opportunities for using assessment data and other feedback to inform decision making.

The creation of consultation structures provides a second kind of mechanism for accountability. These can include staff reviews of individual students' progress or collective assessments of how to help students having difficulties. They can also include joint planning activities of faculty teams and collegial arrangements in which teachers can consult about curriculum concerns, teaching methods, and problems of practice.

Building institutional capacities for learner-centered teaching must include the creation of these opportunities for collaborative planning, reflection, and sharing. Organizational supports for collegial work and learning are critical for the implementation of new educational practices (Fullan and Pomfret, 1977; Warren Little, 1982; Timar and Kirp, 1988). Thus, schools that want to support learner-centered practices must establish structures for ongoing consultation and collaboration among teachers and other school staff.

Combining Accountability Tools to Achieve Equity and Productivity

In deciding which aspects of education should be relegated to bureaucratic accountability and which to professional accountability, it is useful to distinguish between equity and productivity concerns. Equity issues generally must be resolved by higher units of governance, because they "arise out of the conflicting interests of majorities and minorities and of the powerful and powerless," and because local institutions are often captive to majoritarian politics and "intentionally and unintentionally discriminate" (Wise, 1979, p. 206). Matters such as the allocation of resources and guarantees of equal access can and should be bureaucratically regulated and monitored.

On the other hand, productivity questions cannot be solved effectively by bureaucratic regulation, since, at its best, teaching knowledge is context- and content-specific. Thus, uniform policy decisions about teaching methods and school processes cannot meet the needs of varying school and student circumstances. Improving student and school achievement demands discretionary decisions safeguarded by professional accountability.

Wise and Gendler offer a specific example of the equity/productivity distinction: When a state attends to equity by guaranteeing equality of financial resources, it encourages local initiative, equalizes the capacity of poor districts to secure a sufficient and highly qualified teaching force, and permits schools from poor districts to choose among curriculum and equipment options, just as wealthy districts do. When a state regulates outputs (a productivity concern), by mandating achievement outcomes defined by standardized tests, its "effort to produce equal education ends up degrading learning for all. Individuality, creativity, and depth are lost; all that is retained is uniformity, conventionality, and trivial skills" (1989, p. 36).

This argument suggests that state- and district-level bureaucratic accountability mechanisms are appropriate for the equitable allocation of resources, but not for defining educational processes or a single standardized approach for measuring effectiveness. Yet some methods must exist to evaluate how well schools are meeting their obligation to provide a nurturing and educational school experience for all students. In the following section we present a framework for approaching that task.

The growth of bureaucratic forms of accountability in recent decades has made it clear that top-down decision making cannot solve all problems and that overregulation may actually undermine accountability in some ways. In addition to prescribing practices that are bound to be inappropriate for some students, hierarchical decision making often leaves no one accountable for results. When school-level staff are not responsible for making decisions, they do not become responsible for finding solutions to school problems.

The fact that different needs and circumstances require different strategies has brought renewed attention to methods for lodging greater authority and responsibility at the school level. Two concepts currently receiving a great deal of attention are school choice, which aims to create more market accountability, and school-based management, which relies on greater political accountability. To be successful, both would require enhanced professional accountability.

Market mechanisms are intended to make schools more accountable in at least two ways: (1) because of "customer choice," schools will work harder to provide services that parents or students want, and (2) through the mechanism of choice, the market will reveal to policymakers that there are problems they need to address in schools that are undersubscribed. For choice to produce better schooling for most children, however, it will have to be combined with methods to upgrade the quality of instruction in all schools, so that they are worth choosing. Otherwise, market accountability will merely produce greater inequity rather than greater quality.

Other proposals, such as those for school restructuring and new forms of school management, suggest that responsiveness to clients could also be promoted through school structures for shared governance, accessible review and appeals processes, and parental involvement in decisions about their own children. Most school-based management proposals

call for shared decision making among faculty, staff, parents, and students. They presume that better decisions will be made when those who are closest to the situation and who must live with the decisions are involved. Where parent and student participation is called for, these initiatives introduce a form of political accountability that is otherwise very weak in large, impersonal school systems. The greater authority vested in school faculties suggests that professional accountability mechanisms, which aim to ensure the competence and commitment of staff, should also be strengthened so that the authority will be well used.

As these new ideas are explored, each level of the system should assume its appropriate share of responsibility. *States* should be responsible for providing equal and adequate resources to schools and for ensuring the enforcement of equity standards and standards of professional certification. *School districts* should be accountable for the policies they adopt (including everything from staff hiring standards to paperwork requirements), for equity in the distribution of school resources, and for creating processes that make them responsive to the needs and concerns of parents, students, and school-level staff. *Schools* should be accountable for equity in the internal distribution of resources, for adopting policies that reflect professional knowledge, for establishing means for continual staff learning, for creating processes for problem identification and problem solving that drive continual improvements, and for responding to parent, student, and staff ideas. *Teachers* should be accountable for identifying and meeting the needs of individual students based on professional knowledge and standards of practice, for continually evaluating their own and their colleagues' practices, for seeking new knowledge, and for continually revising their strategies to better meet the needs of students.

For the protection of children, it is most important to attend to the balancing of different accountability mechanisms as changes are sought. If schools are to rely less on hierarchical regulation to define school processes, then other forms of accountability must be strengthened to protect student welfare. Greater guarantees of staff competence and commitment would accompany more stringent professional accountability mechanisms. Greater voice for parents and students would accompany more powerful political accountability mechanisms involving participatory decision making at the school site. Greater incentives to attend to consumers' wishes might result from enhanced market accountability mechanisms involving school choice within the public sector. The key is to find the right mix of tools to provide support for school improvements that will encourage responsible and responsive education.

What Might a Learner-Centered Accountability System Look Like?

Although there are widespread concerns that schools find better ways to attend to student learning, nonbureaucratic ideas about how to both stimulate and measure school improvement are still in their infancy. We have stressed that accountability involves much

more than mandating school procedures and measuring the "outputs" of teaching. An accountability system uses a range of tools to *create* practices that are likely to be beneficial for students, to evaluate how well these practices are working, and to address problems as they occur. Among other things, an accountability system must attend to the following:

- How schools hire, support, and evaluate staff.
- How teaching and learning are structured.
- How decisions are made about curriculum, student and teacher assignments, student responsibility, and discipline.
- What mechanisms are established for communication among and between teachers, students, and parents.
- What structures exist for continual inquiry and improvement.

The ways in which schools conduct their affairs in these matters will result in more or less responsible practices and greater or less responsiveness to the needs and views of students, parents, and staff. Accountability is achieved only if a school's policies and practices work both to provide an environment that is conducive to learner-centered practice and to identify and correct problems as they occur.

In this view, accountability is embedded in school *policies*, the statements of commitment a school adopts arising from the values, goals, and norms it holds for itself; the *structures* by which policies are pursued (e.g., methods of organization, consultation, and action that operationalize the commitment); and the *processes* used to engage members of the school community in enacting their commitments in practice. To ensure that these are working as intended, accountable schools institute practices for *feedback and assessment*, *safeguards* to prevent students from "falling through the cracks," and incentives to encourage all members of the school community to focus continually on the needs of students and the improvement of practice. All of these features of an accountable school should reflect the goals, norms, and values of the members of the school community, translating community desires into actions that make good on the rhetorical promises schools make to their publics (see Figure 1).

Much frustration with today's bureaucratically managed schools occurs because they frequently lack several of these elements that would allow them to make good on the rhetorical promises typically embodied in legislation or their local mission statements. While promising to attend to the learning needs of all children, schools often lack the structures and processes by which to identify those needs or address them in a concerted fashion. While hoping to support student success and prevent student failure, schools typically lack assessment tools that would give them useful and usable information about students' abilities and performances. While intending to stimulate improvements, schools generally provide

A Model of an Accountability System

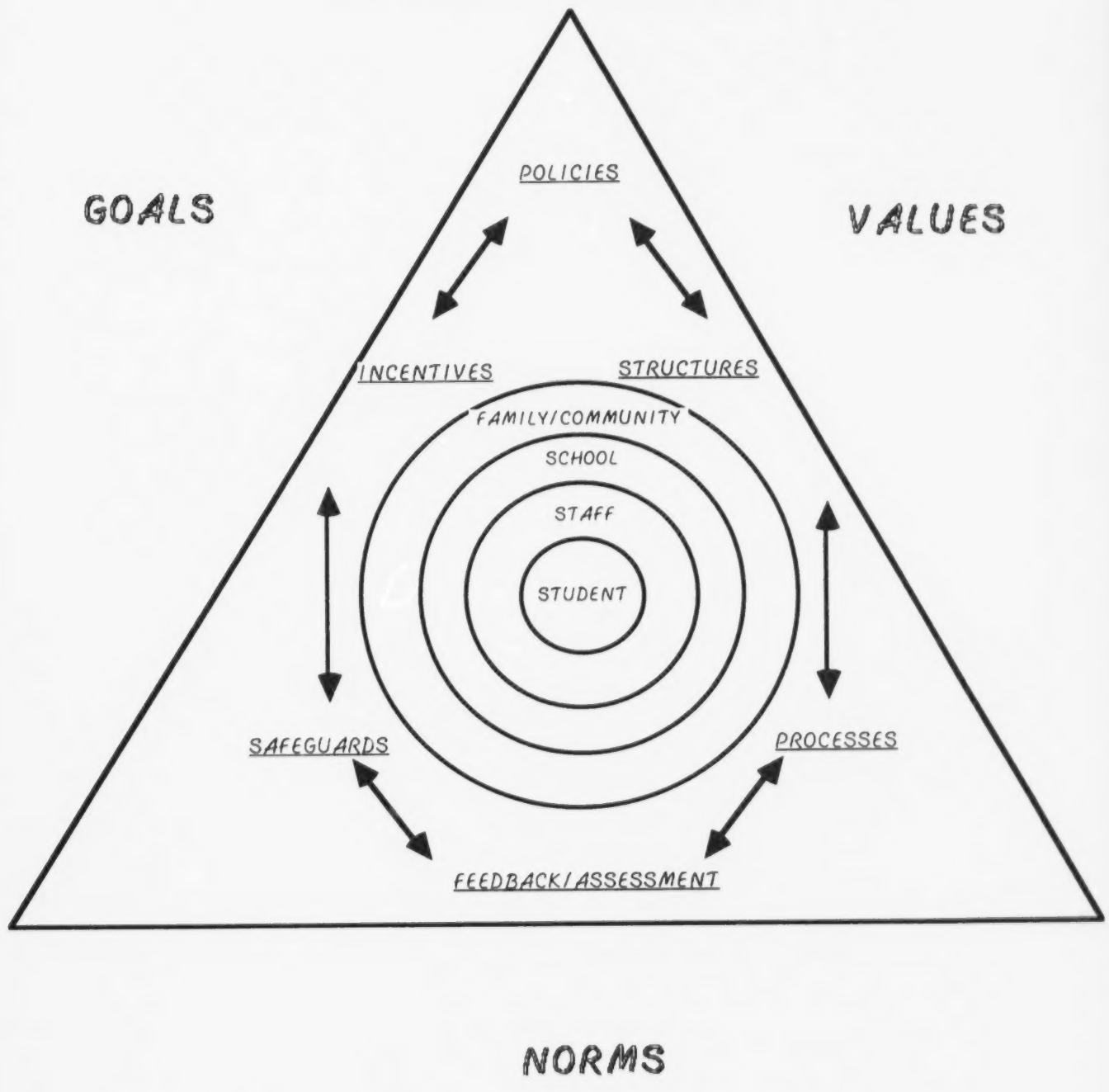


Figure 1.

few incentives for the activities needed to motivate and sustain ongoing inquiry and change. As static institutions divided into egg-crate compartments among which little collective discourse about problems of practice occurs, bureaucratically managed schools lack an engine for accountability.

The ongoing interaction of these six elements (policies, structures, processes, feedback and assessment mechanisms, safeguards, and incentives) constitutes a model of a learner-centered accountability system. The concentric circles in the figure indicate that accountability cycles must exist for all significant educational players (e.g., students, staff, school, family, and larger community). This model suggests that learner-centered schools will hold themselves accountable for:

- Relationships and voice in the school -- for example, governance, decision making, and communication mechanisms developed to ensure that important needs and issues are raised and addressed.
- School organization that helps to personalize relationships, ensures attention to student needs and problems, and brings coherence to teaching and learning.
- Vehicles for staff interaction, shared inquiry, and continued learning that strengthen practice and create opportunities for continual evaluation and improvement of teaching (e.g., teacher evaluation, professional development opportunities, structures for consultation).
- Forms of student assessment that reveal student strengths, talents, abilities, and performance capacities, including methods by which teachers observe and evaluate student growth along with formal exhibitions, performances, examinations, and portfolios.
- Strategies to promote ongoing evaluation of school functioning utilizing input from parents, students, staff, and external reviewers.

A learner-centered system of accountability must acknowledge that the quality of measures used to evaluate student and school progress -- and the ways in which these measures are used in decision making -- have major effects on the quality of education itself. It will wrestle with important issues, including who chooses the measures of educational achievement to be used to assess students and schools, and whether the measures are valid and useful for the different purposes they may be asked to serve.

School accountability thus conceived requires numerous interconnected accountability cycles. In this volume, we present several examples of how such accountability cycles currently operate in urban elementary and secondary schools that are succeeding with students where many others have failed.

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Chapter 2

Learner-Centered Accountability in Action: The Brooklyn New School

Jon Snyder
Linda Darling-Hammond

The Brooklyn New School (BNS) in New York City's Community School District 15 has articulated its academic curricular commitment as the empowerment of students so that they are able to face the challenges and problems of life and can realistically say, "I can do it."

Accountability

Structures and Processes

The staff and parents at BNS have created and implemented many structures and processes to increase the probability that the school will meet its goals. In the general category of relationships and voice in the school, these include:

- Collaborative governance of the school by a steering committee of parents, teachers, and the school director.
- A lottery admission system creating an equal ethnic mix of children in classrooms and of parents on the steering committee.
- Joint teacher/parent/director participation in the selection of staff.
- Decision by consensus (with the necessary time and the training provided).
- An annual survey of parents regarding concerns, comments, and compliments.
- Weekly school and classroom newsletters.
- Twice-yearly family conferences.

- Extensive narrative report cards, which include a rich descriptive report from the teacher along with both the student's and parents' comments, concerns, and compliments.

- Numerous classroom opportunities for guided student choice to operationalize students' dual needs for freedom and structure.

These strategies enact the school's goals of empowering students by ensuring the voice and engagement of students and their families in aspects of classroom and school life ranging from information sharing to decision making and evaluation.

To support student learning within a personalized school organization, BNS has created and implemented a curriculum that is active, explorative, and manipulative, and that emphasizes critical thinking and understanding. The curriculum is always built on student strengths and interests. The school also places students in classes where they spend two years with a teacher in a multiage grouping. This arrangement encourages and allows teachers to be more accountable for student learning as it permits them to come to know the minds and needs of their students well.

To encourage consultation and collaboration among staff, and to enhance teacher learning, BNS has established a number of structures and processes that go far beyond the opportunities for discourse and reflection available in most schools. These include:

- Weekly two-hour staff meetings structured to ensure active and equal participation by inviting each individual staff member to raise ideas or concerns in turn (e.g., rotating chair, jointly established and prioritized agenda).

- Use of the "descriptive review" process (Carini, 1986) in which staff discuss the status and progress of an individual child with an eye toward identifying strengths and capabilities on which to build and environmental supports that might further nurture growth and development. This process is designed to meet the needs of "reviewed" children directly and the needs of all children indirectly by enhancing teacher observational skills and sensitivity to the unique abilities of each child.

- Use of one weekly staff meeting each month for "staff development" (i.e., presentations by specialists on such topics as reading assessment, reporting to parents, language development, etc.).

- Teacher evaluation based on weekly half-hour conferences between the director and individual teachers.

- Opportunities for peer coaching and counseling.

- Close working relationships with local colleges, including collaboratively planned professional development, placement of student teachers, and opportunities to attend seminars.

Together, these structures and processes provide an organization designed to focus on student needs, one that organizes teaching and learning in ways that support student growth and development, and that provides multiple occasions for communication and learning among staff, as well as between staff and parents. This kind of organization continually encourages all members of the school community to reflect on how things are going, while empowering them to raise and pursue ideas for changes that might produce even better outcomes.

Feedback and Assessment

BNS is not afraid of assessing itself or of having others evaluate its work. This past year, for instance, the staff undertook a year-long self-study. They also utilized an evaluation facilitator from the central office as well as the services of a national research and documentation center to help them examine how they might strengthen their teaching practices and their capacity to hold themselves accountable. BNS constantly asks itself:

- How do we know how well we are achieving what we want to accomplish?
- What happens at our school? With what effects on whom?
- What approaches to assessment do -- and can -- we use to help us answer these questions?
- Are these approaches appropriately matched to our values and goals?
- Do these approaches give us information that helps us understand, explain, and improve on what we do?

In seeking answers to these questions, the BNS community uses as many and as wide a range of feedback tools as possible. Parents provide input on report cards, in family conferences, at PTA meetings, and at steering-committee meetings. Student views are expressed in the student newspaper, in responses to report cards, and in interviews. Teachers engage in self-study and in ongoing assessment conferences.

Similarly, in evaluating student performance, many tools are used in conscious and deliberate ways. For example, to gauge students' progress in reading, teachers use informal reading inventories to keep track of what and how students are reading; miscue analysis that provides information about how students are interacting with text; records of student book choices; a wide array of learning activities that provide information about student capabilities

-- oral reading, written and oral book reports, art projects based on books, and research projects; interviews with parents about the child's literacy development at home; individual and group conferences with children about the books they read; student surveys conducted to create summer reading lists; student reading logs; and questions asked by students.

These varieties of student and school assessment tools inform the learning and problem-solving activities that occur in the settings described earlier: faculty meetings, descriptive review sessions, peer-coaching activities, and other structures established to ensure ongoing attention to student needs and school improvement.

Safeguards and Incentives

Many of the preceding structures, processes, and feedback mechanisms function as safeguards and incentives. The Descriptive Review, for instance, is a safeguard for those children who are nearing potentially critical moments of their school experience. It is also an incentive for teachers in that it promotes a rewarding sense of staff camaraderie as well as increased individual efficacy. In addition, BNS staff use the data they gather. They refine and recreate safeguards and incentives to enhance the probability that no student, teacher, or family slips through the cracks. Accepting that the primary goal of accountability is to take action to improve, BNS views change as a desirable programmatic and behavioral regularity in the school.

In the past two years alone, BNS has undertaken many activities aimed at enhancing feedback and strengthening accountability for student performance and well-being. Some of these activities have resulted in new structures and processes for maintaining the inquiry ethic that permeates the school. They include:

- A schoolwide curriculum development project.
- Clarifying joint expectations for learning.
- Setting up individual and small-group tutorials for students in need of extra help.
- Hiring a reading specialist and a resource room teacher.
- Conducting research comparing and contrasting teacher-generated reading data with that from standardized tests to provide a better understanding of what each is measuring.
- Including parents in the staff retreat.
- Conducting parent workshops on reading development and instruction.
- Revising governance procedures.

- Experimenting with the time, location, and function of parent committees to better support participation.

While all of these activities strengthen the safeguards in the accountability system, they also help to provide incentives for continued efforts toward maintaining a learner-centered school. Staff at BNS point to outcomes of these practices, such as positive interactions with students and families, self-respect and the respect of others, freedom and responsibility, collegiality, and opportunities to share skills, as motivating their efforts. In addition, staff value the networking opportunities they are afforded with like-minded schools and practitioners, along with professional development opportunities such as the Primary Language Record Project, which, with the facilitation of external experts, is seeking to improve assessment skills and mechanisms for reporting to parents.

Conclusion

When described in this manner, an accountability system for a learner-centered school may seem like "pie-in-the-sky." What human organization can be expected to do all these things? It is worth restating that BNS is not a hypothetical example. It is a real school operating under the kinds of adverse conditions that characterize many central-city schools. According to the reports of school community members, the efforts to engage in responsible and responsive practice bear their own rewards.

Teachers do not leave this school, but rather enjoy "the permission to do what we know how to do." Parents from all socioeconomic levels report being pleased with how their children are developing, the relief of knowing that "my child is being treated with respect," and knowing "for the first time what and how my son is doing in school." The District 15 school board and the central office, with many plausible bureaucratic reasons for not supporting the school and surmounting considerable pressure from existing power structures, have recognized excellence at BNS by locating a new and larger physical site for the school. Most importantly, the students themselves are happy, secure, and learning.

"Whatever work you do the teacher explains."

"You can talk to the teachers when you have a problem."

"In the Brooklyn New School if you do something wrong, they sit you down and explain it to you."

"The school is much more together, like one family."

"BNS is the best school I ever went to. It helps you to do for yourself and makes it easier to get along with others."

Clearly, learner-centered accountability is possible, but that does not mean it is easy. Many changes in state and local policy, along with school practices, are needed to make schools like BNS one of many, rather than an oasis of enlivened learners in a desert of deadening bureaucracy. As we have discussed, both the profession of teaching and the schools must be restructured.

The many efforts of today's reformers offer reason for hope. On one front, organizations like the Holmes Group, the new National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and a growing group of state professional standards boards, accrediting agencies, and teacher education organizations are working to strengthen the profession. On another, restructuring efforts like the Coalition for Essential Schools, the Foxfire Project, Project Zero, James Comer's School Development Program, the Education Commission of the States' Re:Learning Project, among others, are working to build schools' capacities to focus on the needs of learners. On a variety of fronts, states like New York, California, Minnesota, and Connecticut are working to transform the governance and regulatory structures shaping school possibilities.

Perhaps in this era of school reform we will realize the "Copernican revolution" that John Dewey hoped for when he proclaimed the advent of a "new education" at the turn of the last century -- an era in which all of the "appliances of the school will revolve around the child." One major stimulus for such a revolution will be the effort to establish learner-centered accountability systems at every level of educational governance and in every school.

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Chapter 3

Professional Accountability in the Bronx New School

Maritza B. Macdonald

Jon Snyder

During the last several years, the National Center for Research, Education, Schools, and Teaching has engaged in a series of studies aimed at developing cases that document governance, curriculum and teaching, community, professional development, and accountability in learning-centered schools. This paper addresses professional accountability in one classroom in one such school. Professional accountability for teachers implies the standards of practice teachers demonstrate in their school lives through their knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and the processes teachers develop for holding themselves accountable to these standards. This case documents one classroom in a multicultural public elementary school in New York City in the spring of 1991.

The study describes the work of a teacher of second- and third-graders during the last three months of school. It represents a specific slice of time during the academic year -- the final hour: the time of reckoning, of ending projects, and of reporting to families. It is also a slice of the teacher's practice that describes her behaviors, values, and choices at a particular time and place.

The paper is organized in two sections. Following a description of the methodology, the first section introduces the school and presents a picture of a day in Sue's classroom. It describes the work of one classroom: the explicit interactions between children and adults, with special attention given to accountability processes. The second section discusses the teacher's own cognitive frames for her practice and organizes them in light of issues of accountability and pedagogical decisions. The findings suggest that Sue's essential cognitive frame reflects a "learner orientation." Such an orientation implies that Sue's special knowledge of each student and her knowledge of the classroom community are at the center of her pedagogical decisions. This orientation influences what, how, and why she teaches; what documentation she uses to record her students' learning; and what professional and curricular support she needs for her own work and development as a teacher.

Methodology

The case study is based on analysis of data gathered from observations of classroom events; classroom and school documents; collections of student work; the teacher's analysis, recording, and reporting of student work; and the teacher's reflections on and assessments of her own teaching. Following each classroom observation, the researcher shared her notes with Sue, who then provided her "take" on what had occurred that day -- adding details to present a sharper picture of the practices as well as insights into what she was thinking and why she did what had been documented. The teacher-researcher collaboration was particularly important to the study. The content of this paper was shaped equally by the teacher and the writers or observers.

Accountability issues came into sharp focus as a result of the collaborative analysis of the data. The data provided an example of specific instances of a teacher's practice with "detailed descriptions of how an instructional event occurred, complete with particulars of contexts, thoughts, and feelings" (Shulman, 1986, p. 11). The dilemma in this kind of research is how to elicit teacher decisions and judgments that guide explicit behaviors. The post-observation conferences described above were also influenced by perspectives from pedagogical reasoning (Wilson, Shulman, and Richert, 1987), which provided entry points for probing the nature of the instruction, the adaptations made to respond to learners' needs, and the processes for evaluation and reflection that are fundamental to issues of accountability. This structure, combined with the use of student work to stimulate our conversations, provided us with techniques to "hear" Sue.

One key element of professional accountability is practices that are client-oriented (Benveniste, 1986; Darling-Hammond and Snyder, 1992). "Client" in this case refers to children and their families. Accountability includes, among other things, the systems used for documentation, assessment, and informing children and families of the ongoing learning process and the children's social and academic performance. Another key element of professional accountability is an organizational structure that supports a teacher's ability to be responsible to her or his clients. There needs to be a strong continuity between the teachers' accountability mechanisms and those of the school at large.

The selection of the teacher for this case study was happenstance. Another teacher had been scheduled for observation but, due to schedule changes, was unavailable. Sue said it is "fine with me if you want to come to my class, but it might be boring because we'll be talking about tests." The initial discussion of tests that took place in the first observation later became the starting point from which we moved forward and backward in time to understand Sue's and the school's accountability mechanisms.

A Day in Sue's Class: April 1991

The Final Hour

Spring fills the air during the last week in April. On Fordham Road in the Bronx, children walk briskly to school, jackets tied around their waists or draped over their shoulders. Some are riding subways and buses to school. The school is located in a district reflecting the widespread "savage inequalities" described by Kozol (1991). There is a vast diversity in economic resources, cultural groups, races, and religions within the community. Diverse languages appear on the many multilingual billboards and signs. The result is a complex mix of material wealth and poverty, but also a vibrant sample of the human race, portrayed in the children heading for school on this spring morning.

This is the time of year when standardized tests control life in schools. One cannot help but wonder how much these children's lives are really influenced by schooling, or how much of what they bring with them is validated or included in their school experiences. In many of the classrooms throughout the Bronx, teachers wait for the children, counting thin white booklets and sharpening pencils. They plan to spend most of the next five school days preparing for the citywide reading test to be given next week. The results will be published, teachers' evaluations will be affected, and superintendents will account for their year-long efforts in a chart published in the local newspaper.

The Bronx New School, a small alternative public school housed in the basement of a church, is located just off Fordham Road. The director of the school is near the gate, waiting to meet the three buses that bring children from several areas of the district. They climb off the buses, alert and lively, and enter the small school, a school striving to deal with the inequalities that surround it.

In one classroom in this school, a group of fourth- and fifth-graders makes preparations to spend the day at the Brooklyn Bridge, guided by their teacher, a visiting architecture professor, and his students from a local college. The trip leaders make sure that everyone has lunch, warm jackets, pencils, maps, and pads for note-taking. The group also has a meeting before leaving to discuss some architectural information they will be investigating and to review the safety rules for the trip.

Near the water fountain, several second- and third-graders talk about the mummies they saw on their recent visit to the Metropolitan Museum. In the other fourth and fifth grade, there is a map of a recent class trip to Van Cortlandt Lake. A group of children examines the water in the terrarium and checks the "pond critters" they are keeping alive as part of their study of ecosystems. So the day begins at this public school.

Sue, the teacher of one of the two second/third grade classes, waits for her children. On entering, one feels welcome in the small but cozy room. It is filled with materials -- books made by the children as well as resource books. There are also charts, graphs, bridges, and pyramids created by the children in a variety of materials. The daily schedule, located near the door, shows a pattern of long work periods in the morning and afternoon, integrated subject areas, and specific periods for reading and writing.

Morning Meeting	Lunch
Writing	Quiet Reading/Conferences
Gym/Story (Alt. days)	Story
Snack	Work Period (Math/Soc.St./Sci)
Work Period (Math/Soc. St./Sci.)	Clean-up
	Dismissal

Figure 1. Daily Schedule

The children are sitting on the carpeted area near the door. They have just finished their morning meeting, where they discussed the termination of their two major studies before the end of the year: the Egyptian study and all the projects related to it and the science projects on human and animal habitats. Sue explains that next week they will be taking the citywide tests, and that today they will be using the next twenty-five minutes to become familiar with this type of test. "It is good to know what they look like, and the way in which the tests ask questions," she says. She holds up one of the thin white booklets, *Total Reading -- Learning and Practicing*, and explains that while they practice she wants them to remember three things:

First, we will use this review book, which looks like the test. It gives you examples of the types of questions that come in these tests. It is a good idea to look at all the answers and really think about the one that makes more sense. Making sense is very important, so always ask yourselves, "Does this make sense?" And, if it does, then choose that answer.

Second, it is very important that you understand that this test is only one day in your whole year, and that you have been doing a lot of work, a lot of reading of interesting books, and a lot of writing and drawing about your trips and projects.

And the last thing I want you to know is that reviewing for this test is different from how we regularly work in our class. You won't be able to work together or help each other or use the books and charts from around the room. Today,

think and answer by yourselves.

In these statements, Sue highlights certain values and norms about her teaching practice: (1) making sense is important; (2) cooperative work is a norm; and (3) more than one event is used to evaluate the work of children, and this evaluation is an ongoing process. These statements mirror the attitudes of the director of the school, as evidenced in the following excerpts from the school newsletter to families, dated April 15, 1991.

The Tests:

Thanks to the pressure from the professional and research community, the reading tests for second graders have been modified this year. They no longer test sub-skills such as phonics, syllabication, blends, etc. They are now like the tests for older children -- relatively short passages with words left out. They continue to use fairly short and generally pointless passages followed by trick questions and answers. They continue to do this even though evidence points to the fact that real reading can only occur in meaningful contexts.

At the Bronx New School, learning throughout the year is guided by our understanding of child development, not the requirements of the test. This stays firm as the basic philosophy of the school. An attempt is made to keep a casual and calm attitude toward the tests. They are a fact of life that children must experience in New York City public schools. The way in which we measure your child's growth and development is from such authentic assessment measures as teachers' anecdotal records, checklists of reading and behaviors, running records of children's actual reading performance, portfolios of children's writing, drawing, and mathematical problem solving.

In the classroom, Sue sits by the meeting area, where she assists each second-grader in reading the instructions and matching the section with the answers. The third-graders work by themselves at tables around the room. Every once in a while a child says, "Sue, this doesn't make any sense," or "Does this make sense?" At other times, a child approaches a friend and then remembers Sue's directions to work alone. For twenty-five minutes, the children review the test material with Sue or by themselves, and then the day proceeds without any further talk of tests.

After the test-review period, children move freely around the room, looking for their work partners, for art materials, and for tools such as hammers and staplers. Some work alone, others seek companionship or help from one of three adults in the room: Sue, a male student teacher from a local college, and the researcher. During the work period, the focus is on the culminating events of a study of Egypt. Observing the room while the children work on their projects, one sees many charts, graphs, maps, and lists where children report what they know, and want to know, about particular subjects. All of these make evident the prevailing norms of this classroom:

- Cooperative work
- Making sense
- Organizing information
- Defining ideas
- Building a body of knowledge

There are bins with labels indicating their contents. Considerable creative logic is evident in the organization of so many things in such a small space. Even someone unfamiliar with the room can look at the pictures and labels and find items needed to work independently. There are baskets for homework, and baskets for math, writing, and art work. Many of the ideas expressed in the charts relate to science or to social studies. The environment is rich with ideas. There are all types of books -- from picture books to adult books and stories. There are resource books at many different reading levels: adult books about Egyptian history and about past and current life in Egypt, books about mythology, and books about gold jewelry and pyramids in different areas of the world.

There is an air of authenticity about the ideas recorded from the children and the selection of materials in the room. The language used in the charts and graphs is the children's own, recorded by their teacher, not generated from packaged curriculum materials. Figures 2 and 3 show samples of charts placed around the room:

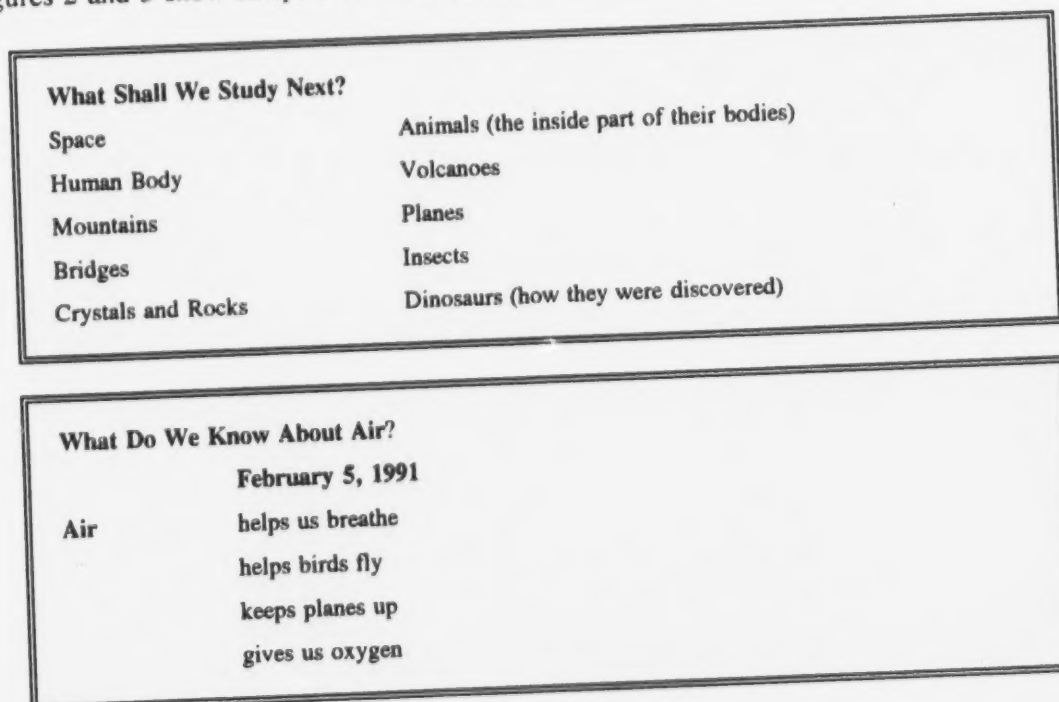


Figure 2. Sample Charts

Class Rules

1. Share Materials.
2. Clean up after yourselves.
3. Keep your hands, feet, and objects to yourself.
4. When someone is talking: Listen!

Figure 3. Sample Chart

On another wall there is an enlarged copy of the New York subway map, well marked with stops from past field trips and other places of interest in the city, indicating advanced mapping skills. The tables are clustered to accommodate three or four children at a time. Students work on a variety of projects both collaboratively and independently. Two girls are discussing the length of the Nile and making labels for the Lower and Upper Nile. Three others are gluing and supporting a paper pyramid until it dries. There is a constant borrowing of paints, markers, glue, and scissors. Other children are writing stories or reports about what they have learned. Some are looking up the exact length of the Nile River to design an accurate key for their map. Adults and children work together, and all are clearly engaged in their tasks. The work time is long, busy, creative, but definitely not silent or directed solely by adults.

The researcher is filling pages with notes and a child asks about them. The researcher responds that her job is to record what she observes happening in classrooms so other people can learn how to create new schools. With an air of wisdom and authority, the child says it would be hard to have "so many people coming to visit schools," and returns to making the legend for her map.

At lunch, the teachers join a staff developer who meets regularly with them to talk about the children and review and discuss the development of curriculum. The staff developer suggests that during these meetings they also make plans to document and assess student work as well as to prepare for meetings with parents.

On this particular day, the children's lunch period is supervised by paraprofessionals, who live in this community and work as aides in the classrooms with younger children. The paraprofessionals also attend individual or staff-development sessions with the school psychologist. He believes that their observations and recommendations are important to understanding the lives of the children outside of school because they know the community so well. The paraprofessionals have made particularly valuable contributions in guidance and home-school issues. Their recommendations have led to such outcomes as meetings with parents whose children were having difficulty attending school; staff discussions about setting limits for the older children; and finding community resources to deal with health,

employment, schooling, and housing problems directly affecting the lives of the children.

After lunch, teachers return to their classrooms to wait for children to come in from recess. Sue checks a list of individual readings. She collects the children's work from the homework basket and places it in folders containing other samples of their work. Also in the homework basket are teacher-made assignments. Figure 4 shows a recent math assignment containing problems dictated by the children:

N's Problem:	6 people are waiting for the bus. How many arms and legs do they have in all?
D's Problem:	There are 5 refrigerators with two sodas in each one. How many sodas in all?

Figure 4. Math problems.

Another assignment is to complete a calendar for the month including all the school-related events, such as trips, project days, and birthdays. This assignment requires interaction with other people and is one example of what Sue means by work that "makes sense."

On another shelf sit stories and reports written by the children. One of the titles is "Two Girls and the Blob." Sue picks it up, smiles, and comments on the length and content of the paragraphs in this child's most recent stories.

Sue and the entire school work hard to communicate with families. Families receive the following documents and materials throughout the school year:

- Letters from the teacher providing ongoing detail about classroom work.
- Notices and newsletters written by the school director about general school events, community issues, and educational issues such as homework, tests, research, and ways of assessing student work.
- Portfolios of their children's work in different subject areas.
- Midyear and spring progress reports (narrative and numerical).
- Homework samples.
- Standardized test results.

Figure 5 shows samples of letters from around the time of this study demonstrating the school-home communication about the curriculum and the upcoming tests.

April 24, 1991

Dear Families:

We had a wonderful trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Egyptian Collection yesterday. I was amazed by the wealth of information the children have already accumulated and their ability to make all kinds of connections to the new objects they were seeing. Their attentiveness and excellent behavior were specially noteworthy! I am sending home a family admissions pass that will enable you and your family to visit the museum free of charge at your convenience. It would be well-worth a visit. Next week we will be returning to the museum for a second look at the Egyptian Collection (it is huge), on May 2nd.

Today we watched a National Geographic video that gave the children a view of the Pyramids and the landscape of Egypt (and thus, the culture in context). Many of the children are also involved in making buildings out of cardboard and are involved in intense problem solving (i.e., how do I make this wall stand up or keep the roof from caving in?).

Intensive writing continues, as does our work in math involving multiplication and division concepts. We are also beginning to prep for the reading test.

Sue

May 30, 1991

Dear Families:

As another year draws to a close, our class would like to invite you into our classroom for "Book and Project Day" on Wednesday, June 12th, at 1:30 pm.

Your children will have the opportunity to share their written and three-dimensional work at this time. Refreshments will be served. Please dress coolly because it can get very warm in our little room!

I will appreciate your filling out the form below and returning it so that we have some idea of how many guests to plan for.

Thanks,

Sue

Figure 5. Sample Letters

Sue continues her preparations before the children return from recess. She saves some of the children's work in folders, writes instructions for the afternoon work, and sets up materials at each of the tables. One of the children arrives from recess earlier than the rest of the group and informs Sue that there was an argument on the playground. Sue reassures him that they will have a meeting to discuss the problem and find a solution. The child seems comforted and waits for the rest of his class to return.

When the others arrive, they appear upset. Sue speaks briefly with the adult who has been with the group, then asks the children to get a drink of water, if they need one, and to join her in the meeting area. The student teacher also joins them. Sue starts the meeting by asking what happened, and what they think needs to be done when there is an argument between two people. Some children raise their hands and others speak up right away. They ignore the first question and Sue listens to their responses to the second. Some say, "They should work it out." Others argue, "You shouldn't get involved." Sue calmly asks, "Why?" By their involvement in responding and finding solutions, it seems they are used to solving conflicts as a group.

One child explains that "when too many people are involved, then you start blaming." Another states, "It is hard to say who is right if your friend is involved in the argument." A third student expands on the idea of the loyalty of friends. She gives examples of how even grownups have a hard time when there is an argument that involves a friend. More examples are given about similar situations at home and at school. Sue listens attentively. She discusses solutions in a way that does not focus on the particulars of the children's argument in the playground, but rather on the nature and consequences of conflicts common to the entire group.

They finish the discussion by agreeing not to turn little problems into big problems. Sue stresses that, in the future, they should first try to solve the arguments among themselves. If they cannot, Sue reassures them that she and the other adults in the school are there to help them.

The day ends with individual reading. All the children locate their books and begin to read. Many of the selections relate to some aspect of natural science or to people and the way they live. As Sue reads with the children individually, she takes notes. During the last ten minutes, she reads the class a chapter from a story she has been reading with them for the last week.

After the children leave, there are still jobs to do. Sue notes the progress that has been made on the different projects they worked on during the afternoon, talks to the student teacher about the children he was helping during work time, and collects the test review books, commenting to herself how some of these text examples make no sense to her students. She writes notes documenting the problems of particular children, describing the areas in which they experience difficulty.

During this time, Sue shows the researcher review books she has made with the children at the end of a curriculum study. They include work samples and written commentaries from all of the children, showing what projects they have worked on and what they have learned. One of the books, *Making Our Family Homes*, begins with, "First we made room maps. We pretended we were bugs on the ceiling looking down on our rooms." On other pages there are maps of "How to get to school from our homes" and an explanation of how "we brought shoe boxes into school to make our own model homes."

A Taste of Home: Family Recipes from Sue's Class is the title of another curriculum review book. This book includes a picture of each child with members of her or his family, a brief narrative about each family, and a favorite family recipe. The narratives, as exemplified by the following four, show the diversity of the class:

My Family: Picture number one is my mom, dad, and me. Picture number three is my brother and sister. What is important to me is that they love you a lot, and also we are all from Nigeria and now we live in New York City. [Her recipe is for Chin-Chins.]

The Pictures: The picture I am going to bring today is about my family. My family comes from Taiwan. Now we live at New York. [Her recipe is for Shrimp Chow Mein.]

My Family: Both my mom and dad were born in New York. Mom was born on Governor's Island in an Army Hospital. [His recipe is for Chocolate Fudge Brownies.]

My Sister's Birthday Party: This is in my grandmother's house in the Dominican Republic. It is my sister's birthday. [His recipe is for Arroz con Gandules.]

City Lights: Experimenting with Electricity and Building a City, also by Sue's class, opens as follows:

Starting June of last year we were interested in electricity. What could you do with a battery, bulb, and wire? We decided to find out!
How many ways could we find to make a bulb light up?
How many ways would it not?
We drew diagrams of our discoveries.

Later, in one of our focused conversations, Sue used these books to stimulate her recall of curriculum decisions and to analyze, in more detail, the value of the homework she assigned, the different levels and ways of expressing knowledge, and the nature of the projects and experiments that occurred during the year. These books are authentic examples of the three values expressed earlier in the day: making sense, working cooperatively, and using multiple ways to demonstrate one's knowledge.

Discussion

This section summarizes the findings, draws preliminary conclusions about studying accountability in elementary schools, and explores possible future directions for such work. Four dimensions of professional accountability summarize what Sue expected of herself, her colleagues, and her school. The four encapsulate the nature of our findings:

1. A teacher and a school with a defined professional role.
2. A teacher and a school with a sense of community that includes an understanding of diversity in students, learning, and teaching.
3. A teacher and a school whose work is grounded in children's social and intellectual experiences.
4. A teacher and a school that use multiple accountability mechanisms, including continuous opportunities for teacher growth and support.

A Teacher and a School with a Defined Professional Role

To be successful at teaching, one must know who one is and what one is about. Sue was "about" transforming herself, transforming the conception of knowledge, and, most importantly, providing her students with the tools to transform themselves. In short, she was constructing a classroom community of learning. She held herself accountable to this task by designing and documenting her own and her students' work in ways that were responsive to the individuals and their contextual needs; by seriously sustaining the dialogue among herself, her students, and their families in meaningful ways; and by being knowledgeable about her students, their families, herself, the subject matter, and pedagogy.

A day in Sue's classroom showed many examples of these commitments. Speaking about children's achievement and her relationship to it, Sue explained:

I feel very strongly that I am the teacher. That is my main role. I am not a friend. I feel the same way towards parents. It is lovely if I become friends with them, but my primary role is as their child's teacher. And, therefore, their child is going to learn in my classroom.

She reflected often on the difficulty of fulfilling her sense of being a teacher:

A teacher has to work very hard to make sure that everyone is included, that there is no such thing as an outsider; everyone is an insider. If someone is an

outsider, I need to work with the whole group to move all children into the inner circle. Eventually, they learn to do that for each other, sort of self-regulating.

Her description of her work with one child illustrates how she put all of her commitments together by building on the strengths of each individual within the social context of the classroom:

First I met with the mom, then he [the student] joined us. We discussed it together. She needed to know that I was going to help her child but that we both needed to work together. We also worked really hard to help him become part of the group. He needed to know that we would help him but that there were limits he could not cross. "You cannot attack other children or go off into your own world." By the end of the second year, this child could stand in front of the room and share his work. This is why I am such a proponent of mainstreaming. You cannot put kids who are crazy in a setting where everyone is crazy or they stay crazy! And instead of reinforcing that negative view, I try to look for the talents too -- this child happens to be the most incredible artist I have ever seen. I am an artist as well, that is my training pre-teaching. So there is where we really hooked in personally, and then we built on that.

A Sense of Community

The classroom and the school, as a community of learners, were at the center of Sue's life as a teacher. Collaboration, collegiality, and community building describe Sue's and the school's values and practices. These help prevent fragmentation while enhancing noncompetitive, communal, and client-centered problem solving (Sarason, 1971; Little, 1988; and Miller, 1991). In practice, these values are enacted in the quality of interactions and dialogues that are maintained for mutual trust and respect.

Talking about her class, Sue emphasized the importance of community in the learning process and the role of the children in supporting this sense of community: "It was a very strong group, and they really felt that they belonged to one another by the end of those two years. Even the kids who had come into the class late were really welcomed into the community." Sue spoke often of the school traditions that helped foster a sense of community, such as the school sing, the Friday school meetings, and the numerous field trips.

The entire school used to meet on Fridays, and we'd do this beautiful thing where a couple of kids from each class would share some project they were working on. It could be a story, a three-dimensional project -- it could be anything. Three girls brought their relief map!

I feel that all the trips helped build class solidarity and community. By December, all the discipline problems began to fade as the kids hooked into it. Trips were probably the single most unifying experience for everyone.

Work Grounded in Children's Experience

Grounding classroom work in a student's own social and intellectual experience is based on a social-constructivist model of how children learn (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1966; Moll and Greenberg, 1990) that requires active involvement, connections between school and community, and inclusion of home knowledge in school work. It demands a rich and challenging curriculum grounded in cognitive theory, responsive to diverse populations of students, and providing opportunities to solve problems using critical thinking. In addition, it requires multiple ways of assigning, observing, documenting, and assessing student work.

One key ingredient is flexible assignments with perceptive observations of the choices students make. Discussing the beginning of the study of habitats, Sue shared a book the class had made: "I left the initial assignment open ended. The children did not have to just do a bedroom. They could draw any part they liked about where they lived. It was really interesting to see what they selected."

A second key ingredient is the ability to transform the observation-based understanding of children into authentic and intellectually rigorous learning experiences. For instance, when asked about the unit on Egypt, Sue replied:

That got started during a work period. It was an extraordinary thing. One of the children started making pyramids of Legos. Then a couple of children started doing it too, and I was fascinated. When S. reported on what she had done during work period and pulled off the top of the pyramid and they saw it was hollow, everyone seemed hooked. I said to myself, "Let me get some books on Egypt and pyramids and see what happens."

At another point, she recalled how parents and community issues folded into the unit:

I wrote to the parents explaining that we seemed to be embarking on a study of Egypt, so if they had anything at home that related, please send it in with the child. I do that all the time. So the books started to come in. A Jewish girl brought these books about Passover, and the kids started making the connections to the Jews as slaves of the Egyptians with work we had done when we spoke about African-American slavery here in this country, and Harriet Tubman and Moses, and they were making these incredible connections.

Sue's elaboration on field trips exemplifies the use of the community as a source for developing inquiry that includes children's social and cultural lives outside of the school:

We took lots of nature walks. We counted everything and then gathered all that data and put it into graphs. I gave them maps. We used subway maps for two years. For every single trip I would blow up that section, and they marked exactly where we were going. A couple of kids were totally fixated on the New York City Transit System....

I really like going back to the same places several times. I find that the kids' interests and focus deepens. We went back to the Botanical Garden three times.

Finally, assessment of student growth is an active ongoing process also grounded in the interests and strengths of students. In a reference to the writing process, Sue showed one student's work and explained: "She worked on this book probably six or eight weeks, began this very involved story called 'Kamar Lost In Egypt.' And that child pulled together almost every single aspect we had studied about Egypt within her story."

One of the major challenges often posed to educators in learning-centered schools is: "It all sounds wonderful, but how do you integrate children's interests with the demands of external requirements and expectations?" Sue explained how she approached the task with this example:

I really needed to go with his interest in fish because it seemed to run so deep, and he had not been so involved previously. I also needed to study how to make this interest appropriate for third grade level work. The new state science curriculum guide was the answer. I got lots of ideas for experiments on water pressure, temperature, sound waves, ocean zones, and other multisensory, science-focused work...

I am informed of what is in the State Curriculum Guides. I don't use them to cover that curriculum, but to see how what I plan uncovers the curriculum. Through my science studies and trips and mapping, I found that all the math skills we used were part of the math curriculum. I know what is there and I find ways to uncover it.

Multiple Accountability Mechanisms

Sue and the Bronx New School used multiple accountability mechanisms to assure responsible and responsive practice -- in planning, teaching, evaluating, and reflecting. For instance, at the end of each unit of study, Sue and her class would collect all their thoughts and artifacts and distill this material into a book about the subject of the unit:

What I do is document the whole process. I set up structures to review what they did and they write it up. I arrange photos in a logical way, and we do a lot of recall -- even from one year to the next. [Flipping through the pages of one such book and giving the researcher a guided tour] Here is Betty finishing her house and sewing her pillows. Brian is making people out of wood. I also posted all the room plans.

Accountability and learning to read are nearly synonymous in the primary grades. Sue believes that when children leave her class, they should be able to read for information. This skill, she believes, will open doors for them to learn about anything. Therefore, she does not use basal readers. She does, however, keep close track of her children's reading skills: "It is sort of accountability. I make sure that silent reading is not just looking at pictures. I use miscue analyses regularly. I know that some teachers hate it, but I need to know where a kid is at."

When discussing the role of tests in her accountability scheme, Sue emphasized,

It is my responsibility to help prepare children to deal with them. It alleviates worry. I also explain to parents that development is uneven and that a child may zoom ahead in math and not have the same results in reading. I also make sure I have many ways of documenting the different areas of learning so that I can explain to families what their children can do.

At the school level, staff meetings are an important forum for keeping the adults intellectually alive:

We discussed curriculum all the time. The bulk of our staff meetings was never business. We'd go through that really quickly and we were very focused around literacy or math development, all curriculum. At one point, we developed a structure for a curriculum review following the Descriptive Review format from the Prospect School in Vermont.... It was really a chance to assess not only what I had done, but where we had problems. What was mine, and what was more the children's agenda, and what I had done when they came into conflict. At one point, I really started reflecting on the children. Is a child who mostly observes less engaged than someone who is actually doing a project? How am I valuing the two situations?

The staff also kept up-to-date on changes and advances in teaching, such as whole language, using the new framework from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics as a model for collaborative staff development, implementing the state's new science framework, exploring educational opportunities at museums and technology centers, considering issues of second language learning, and tapping on children's previous knowledge. In addition, the staff developed their own standards and processes for evaluating themselves. In so doing, they were forced to come to a consensus and to articulate the

essence of what they considered "good teaching," as well as to develop flexible indicators for these standards.

Conclusions and Further Directions

Sue's classroom provides a picture of the interdependency that exists between teacher knowledge of self, learners, context, curriculum, teaching, and assessment that is essential if a school is to be responsive to the needs of its clients. Such interactions and relationships, when elegantly enacted, are the components of professional accountability. Sue's classroom also highlights the relationship between continuous opportunities for professional growth and support and truly accountable practice.

Our work with Sue suggests that professional accountability can be further probed through three different types of research:

- Descriptive case studies of effective, experienced teachers whose work in constructing communities of learners can be used as a starting point for analysis. By probing into actual practices, the field may acquire a deeper knowledge of the preparation and beliefs that inform successful construction of knowledge in learning-centered classrooms.
- Descriptions of complete school settings that reflect and support a systemic approach to professional accountability with a learning-centered focus. Such work could describe the goals, contexts, values, norms, structures, feedback mechanisms, incentives, and safeguards that foster accountability.
- Descriptive studies of teacher development (preservice and in-service) and teacher evaluation policies and practices that increase the probability of the kinds of professionally accountable practices so well actualized in Sue's classroom in the Bronx New School.

In conclusion, perhaps the most significant aspect of this study is its portrayal of Sue's attempts to address issues of diversity that are essential for intellectually engaging education for students who have been traditionally underserved by more traditional systems of accountability. Sue's pedagogical decisions and her ways of uncovering and assessing knowledge are respectful and responsive to the varied needs of her multicultural classroom. They are also consonant with the standards proposed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1991) for making teaching responsive to issues of diversity:

To respond effectively to individual differences, teachers must know many things about the particular students they teach: Alex has a stutter, Maria loves science fiction, Toby is anxious about mathematics, Marcus is captivated by

jazz. But accomplished teachers know much more -- whom their students go home to at night, how they have previously performed in standardized tests, what sparks their interest. This kind of specific knowledge is not trivial, for teachers use it constantly to decide how best to tailor instruction. (p. 17)

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Chapter 4

The Development of Authentic Assessment at Central Park East Secondary School

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The creation story of the authentic assessment system of Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS) illuminates the challenges and dilemmas a school community confronts as it courageously dares to make radical change. It demonstrates the power of an internally developed assessment system to promote a high level of internal learner-centered accountability that has yet to be achieved by externally developed assessments, and that such assessments seem to thwart.

Founded by Deborah Meier seven years ago on the southwestern rim of East Harlem's El Barrio, Central Park East Secondary School is home to 450 seventh- through twelfth-grade students. Although all of the students have chosen to attend CPESS, they are not screened. This ensures that the school serves students of all ability levels and that classes are heterogeneous. Sixty percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch; 85 percent are African-American and Latino, and 25 percent are special education students.

Meier's intent was to create a radically different kind of secondary school education, which, of course, would require a radically different form of assessment. Guided by TheodoreSizer's set of ideas about secondary schooling (1984), CPESS committed itself to performance-based assessment and graduation by exhibition, as opposed to the typical system of accumulating seat time as credit toward graduation, which it rejected as incompatible with its goal to educate "students to use their minds well and to prepare them to live productive, socially useful and personally satisfying lives" in our democratic society. (*Central Park East Secondary School Senior Institute Handbook*, 1991, p. 2). Graduation by exhibition would require students to use multiple forms of evidence to demonstrate their knowledge and mastery of skills. This requirement broadened the conventionally narrow spectrum in which student proficiencies could be assessed.

In designing and developing an assessment system that would encourage and support students to find the most effective means of demonstrating their knowledge and mastery of skills, CPESS confronted five critical issues:

1. **Requirements for graduation by exhibition:** What would students be required to do?
2. **The process of assessing students' qualifications for graduation:** How would judgments be made and by whom?
3. **Criteria for making judgments:** What indicators and standards would be used to evaluate students' qualifications for graduation?
4. **The context for such a process:** What kind of organizational structure would be necessary to successfully support students and staff through this new process?
5. **The validity of the system:** Did the assessment process assess what the school wanted it to assess? What needed to be assessed? How would the school know if this new system could stand up in "the court of the world?"

Requirements

In order to be eligible for a diploma, students are required to demonstrate knowledge and mastery of skills on the basis of multiple forms of evidence. Students must meet the requirements of an instructional and external learning program that corresponds to their postgraduation plan, and complete fourteen portfolios, along with a series of more traditional exams and a senior project. The categories of portfolios reflect the school's goals to educate in the academic, personal, and social domains: There are the expected math, science, history, and literature portfolios, but also autobiography, postgraduation plan, community service/internship, ethics, and practical skills portfolios.

The fourteen portfolio areas attempt to accommodate the tensions between breadth and depth. Fourteen areas provide the breadth, but within each area, students complete in-depth projects. Topics for portfolios have included "Internship Blues," "The Use of Power in *Antigone*," "Slavery: The Struggles and Hardships of Black Women," "Geometric Home," "Comparison of Two Wave Forms," and "Menstruation." Students demonstrate knowledge and mastery of skills not only through the work itself, but by presenting and defending seven of the fourteen portfolios to their graduation committee in a manner similar to the oral defense of a doctoral dissertation. Of the seven major portfolios to be presented, three are selected by the students and four, in the areas of math, science, literature, and history, are required.

Because knowledge and mastery of skills are demonstrated in diverse ways, CPSS encourages diverse modes of presentation: Research papers, videos, constructions, and

the analytic, creative, and practical domains, and have opportunities to work cooperatively and communally. The portfolios become not only an instrument for assessing skills, but a vehicle for developing skills.

To further promote the value of in-depth study, as well as the value of intellectual passion, CPESS encourages students to pursue the deeper study of one of the fourteen portfolios that is of particular significance to them for their senior project. The exams students must take include the New York City Foreign Language Proficiency Test and the Regents Competency Tests in reading, writing, math, and science.

Process

Who is better suited to judge what students know than those who know the students best? Since CPESS places a premium on teachers' knowing students well, and over time, it is the school community that is best suited to judge the students' readiness and qualification for a diploma. Therefore, a committee of four or five individuals who represent the school community becomes the instrument of judgment. This graduation committee, organized by the student's advisor in collaboration with the student, includes the advisor, another teacher, an assigned eleventh grade student, and an adult of the student's choice. In many instances, students will select a parent or the site supervisor at their internship placement.

The committee evaluates each of the fourteen portfolios, presentations, and defenses, along with the other requirements, and makes a recommendation on graduation to the entire faculty. Only by consent of the entire faculty can a student receive a diploma. This places the responsibility for graduation standards solely in the hands of the school community. Ultimately, each committee member must ask himself or herself, and the committee must collectively decide, if the portfolios are "good enough," in the words of Meier, "to stand up in the court of the world."^{*}

Committee meetings function according to standardized procedures. Presentations and defenses are scheduled for at least thirty minutes. They are followed by evaluations and judgments that are made holistically and consensually through a process of conversation in which the committee members are expected to persuasively, logically, and rationally argue their points of view about each portfolio according to the school's criteria for evaluation. Students whose work is found wanting are directed to present again and students dissatisfied with the committee's judgment may elect to present again. Neither scenario is unusual.

^{*} Quotations not identified by specific documents or publications have been taken verbatim from interviews with CPESS community members.

Both the students and their parents have access to the committee's meetings and may question its judgments -- a situation quite unlike that with more typical, unquestionable test results.

The access all members of the school community have to this process, as well as to information about the process, demystifies assessment and makes it public information. If information is power, then at CPESS it is the process -- and not only the outcome of assessment -- that is empowering to the very individuals who are most affected by this process, yet are usually eliminated from it -- the parents and the students. This act of inclusion and empowerment democratizes schooling. Once students know how to achieve and what to do in order to achieve, once they can influence both the process and the outcome, the opportunity for achievement increases. As Meier explains it:

Most things in life are not like tests where you can't question the results. Most things are matters of human judgment. And in CPESS' assessment system, you've got to persuade us and we've got to persuade you, if we give you an assessment different than you think. We've got to make a persuasive case for it.

The ethos of assessment as a matter of human judgment and the policy of access that exposes that process of judgment make assessment a process of public accountability and create a culture of inquiry. In such a culture, individuals -- teachers, parents, and students -- are encouraged to question how their roles and the school's role, the school's program, and the assessment itself affect the outcomes of students' education.

Rather than feeling threatened or defensive by the feedback and scrutiny, teachers and students are energized to find solutions to the problems revealed. CPESS staff have participated in professional-development retreats, and they have revised and continue to revise the school schedule so that teachers can provide greater support for students. At professional-development retreats, CPESS teachers have debated not only the issue of pedagogy, but how pedagogy impacts on equity, confronting the dilemmas posed by the relationship between teacher expertise, or lack of it, and student opportunity for diverse levels of achievement and success.

Students, in typical adolescent fashion, have requested increased teacher intervention and monitoring that illuminate the degree of professional commitment to students, the trust students have in their teachers, and the teaching/parenting nature of teachers' roles: "Look, Jill," said one student to a teacher. "You yell at me. You make me sit down. I want you to make sure that I do this." All of the students comment regularly on the availability of all of the teachers and on each teacher's desire to make sure that each student succeeds. As another recalcitrant adolescent remarks about her advisor, who is also her chemistry teacher: "She bothers me. She gives me the 'what ta do' and I have to do it. And if I don't understand something, she's there, just her and me, and she'll explain it to me in a one-on-one."

Criteria

The criteria for judging portfolios were established by the faculty and correspond to the goals and values of the school. These criteria include the use of conventions, the presence of voice, and the presence of five habits of mind; critically examining of evidence, presenting multiple perspectives, identifying connections and patterns, imagining alternatives, and making judgments on social and personal value. Throughout the students' six years at CPESS, teachers emphasize these five habits of mind in all instructional areas, with the result that they form a whole-school cognitive construct for both students' intellectual development and teachers' instruction.

The omnipresence of these habits of mind in the instructional program enables students to internalize ways of thinking, not only about subject matter but about their lives and the world. CPESS students credit these acquired habits of mind with raising their consciousness on matters of social injustice and making them activists for social justice and change.

The habits of mind become both the means and the measure by which students learn to use their minds well. The degree to which student work demonstrates the CPESS habits of mind is evidence of the school's success in enabling students to construct knowledge as independent and mature thinkers.

Graduation committees assign one of three ratings to portfolios: distinguished, satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory. Anything less, and students must present the portfolio to their committee again. This feature of the assessment eliminates the concept of failure, as well as the strategy of failure to avoid the pain of struggling to succeed. It intertwines teacher and student accountability. No one is let off the hook, and no one feels let off the hook. As achievement is the only acceptable option, both teachers and students must become partners in the struggle to make it happen. In the process, students learn a work ethic: habits of work, as well as skills such as perseverance and time management -- habits of study -- that will make the difference between success and failure in the future.

The continuous faculty discussions about the assessment rubric, coupled with the faculty's experience in collaborative judgment-making, are an object lesson on the dilemmas of finding a common language with which to articulate and set standards and to build consensus on what those standards should be. Meier explains the dilemmas of setting standards in the context of first experiences, which means setting foundations, frameworks, and definitions: "We're doing something that hasn't been done. That is -- setting decent standards. For all of these assessments -- writing, oral presentations, videos -- we need to decide what is good enough."

The challenge of seeking and setting decent standards is at once an exciting and frustrating process fraught with competing tensions. It aims a penetrating searchlight on teachers' assumptions and internal processes of judgment-making and practice that, in the privacy and isolation of traditional and externally developed assessment, can remain comfortably unconscious, unarticulated, and unscrutinized. In the context of traditional assessment, teachers need never reflect on or critique their practice, or confront the judiciousness of their practice or the contradictions between rhetoric and practice. The collaborative and public process of seeking and setting standards and of making judgments demands that the teachers and the school consider their actions in the light of responsible and responsive practice.

How do teachers balance the objective and critical stance with the subjective and supportive stance? How do they reconcile the contradictions of analytic and holistic judgments? Where does rigor fit in? What role should effort play? How do teachers resolve what Grant Wiggins refers to as "the difference between growth and progress" (1991), especially in light of the inequities in students' starting points? All of these dilemmas must be considered before "the court of the world," which, in the harsh light of day, will judge both students and school on the basis of outcomes and products.

As the process of assessing student work becomes a mechanism for assessing teacher professionalism and accountability, teachers ask themselves, and one another, what they mean and how they know: "What is a portfolio?" "What makes a solid paper?" "What does minimal level mean?" "How do we get a sense of whether the kids know that the portfolio reflects them?" "How do we teach so that students can do what we expect?" "How do we *not* teach to portfolios the way we used to teach to tests?" Teachers' conceptual differences and subject area limitations surface: "What constitutes a literature paper?" "How do we get non-math teachers to see math as more than calculation -- to see it as a method of problem solving?"

Since the same rules of evidence that apply to the work of students apply to the judgments of teachers, teachers who think they agree on standards will not know their degree of accord or discord until they have to apply these standards to the work of actual students. The shift from assessment on paper to assessment in practice has its own distinct set of dilemmas that the staff must confront if this process is to work.

Context

Obviously, an assessment system as innovative and complex as the one at CPSS cannot be an add-on to a school. As Meier points out, the graduation process has its roots in

the authentic assessment activities and processes that characterize the first four years at CPESS. From grades seven through ten, there are at least four major conferences each year that include the students, their advisors, and parents. The conferences center on the work of the students, just as the portfolio assessment centers on the work of the students. The actual artifacts are present, along with different teachers' narratives evaluating student work and progress. Meier explains that the conferences permit the possibility of a real exchange because everything necessary for a conversation is present: the student, the parent, and the work.

Although the graduation committee is a formal extension and expansion of this conversation, the two-year Senior Institute was created to provide a formal and informal support system that would take students and teachers through the process of graduation. A separate division with its own staff, curriculum, and course work, the Senior Institute encompasses the eleventh and twelfth grades, and is conceived of as a transition into adulthood.

Admission to the Senior Institute occurs only after students' prior achievement in grades seven through ten is assessed as adequate. The Senior Institute provides students with experiences from which their portfolios can emerge, as well as experiences that will prepare them for life after CPESS. In addition to the academic course work at CPESS, there are courses at local colleges, internships, cooperative work opportunities, and trips to East Coast college campuses. Students report that these experiences enable them to redefine themselves and their futures. One student explains how the visits to college campuses transform the students' goals and expectations:

By seeing different colleges and how positive it is, by seeing it themselves, they get a different perspective. They start to realize that this is what they need to do if they are going to be in business or be a lawyer or a doctor. You'd be surprised at how many kids change their minds and decide to go to college.

The courses students take at local colleges teach them what colleges expect, and how they must adapt if they are to succeed. One student explained her adjustment to the demands of a college course in Greek Mythology:

I am reading *The Iliad* by Homer, and the readings are very hard. I have to go over it twice to really get the idea of what's going on. It really does help to reread a few times. Everything is hard. Writing papers like college kids do. At CPESS you draft a lot, but not as much as they do. They draft and draft, and draft. I'm thinking, when I get to college, it's going to be exactly like this. And at least I'll have an advantage. I'll know what they're going to expect.

She has learned perseverance and fortitude, skills that increase both capacity and opportunity to succeed in her chosen future. The Senior Institute provides a formal and informal support system of adult and peer intervention and coaching that carries students through the portals of portfolio preparation, presentation, and defense, to graduation. Although time for portfolio preparation is formally built into the schedule, it is buttressed by the flexibility of an informal support network that works on an individual as-need basis, can be orchestrated by either students or teachers, and depends on mutual adult-student access, as well as on adults' and students' knowing each other well.

Students learn how to present and defend their portfolios through their participation on graduation committees when they are eleventh-graders. Here is one student's analysis of what she learned from participation on a graduation committee:

I learned how a student's paper is written, that every student writes differently -- some get into more depth, some have different viewpoints. Sitting on a graduation committee really told me how to prepare for my graduation committees in the future. You see other persons' mistakes and you tend to not make that same mistake.

When the committee rated a geometry portfolio unsatisfactory, this student said, "I understood that you have to really focus on what you have to say." Her experiences with her own committee built on her experience as a member of another student's committee and developed her capacity for metacognitive intervention: "I can present and defend as long as I know what my paper is about. I know what my paper is about by reading it over and over and getting a sense of what it's about. I take notes on my paper and I underscore key concepts. "

The assessment process is a learning process that builds students' insight and confidence. It becomes what one teacher describes as "a self-fulfilling prophecy." "As kids get better at defending their portfolios, and as they see themselves getting better, they get better."

The Senior Institute also provides teachers with the opportunity and structure to increase their capacity in instruction, assessment, and self-assessment through weekly staff meetings, transcripts of portfolio evaluations, and videotapes of teacher performances on graduation committees.

Validity

How do the graduation committee assessments hold up in "the court of the world?"

In order to assess the assessment, CPESS developed an assessment review process with three components: two internal and two external review committees and an all-school retreat.

The review committees were designed to provide data on interrater reliability, as well as to provide a friendly critique of the system itself. The mission of the all-school retreat was to review the graduation committee policies and practices. CPESS would later use the feedback from the assessment-review process to articulate directions for immediate and long-range change.

CPESS staff comprised the internal review committees. Professors in the major disciplines from local two- and four-year colleges, researchers, teachers, and administrators from other secondary schools comprised the external review committees. Each set of committees assessed samples of student portfolios that ranged in graduation-committee ratings from distinguished to minimally satisfactory. The staff organized the data, analyzing and discussing it with the external reviewers. Additionally, CPESS staff raised questions with professional and programmatic implications: "Were all staff members using the same criteria when assessing student work?" "Did student work reflect a standard that would be acceptable at the college level?" The assessment review process provided CPESS with feedback not only on assessment, but on virtually every aspect of the school. A follow-up study on graduates is currently under way and the feedback will provide yet another source of information for CPESS to use in the refinement of the assessment system.

The willingness of the Central Park East Secondary School community to subject itself to close scrutiny and to plan change on the basis of reflection and feedback is a lesson in the power of internally developed assessment to promote a high level of internal learner-centered accountability. Because the CPESS community creates and recreates the assessment system, because this community is continuously engaged in assessment-making, CPESS -- not some outside force -- is directly responsible for and in control of its professional and institutional fate. As the primary designer and user of its own assessment system, CPESS has a high stake in both the utility and the success of the system, which makes incentives for change and improvement integral to the system itself. Self-interest and community interest become one.

In its still young life, Central Park East Secondary School's has produced impressive early results. Its graduation rate is over 90 percent. Of that 90 percent, 95 percent go on to postsecondary schools, with 92 percent of these students enrolling in four-year colleges. As part of a big city school system that graduates only 60 percent of all students who enter high school, and as part of a nation that has a disturbingly large discrepancy between the college admission rates of whites and African-Americans and Latinos, it would seem that what CPESS has accomplished is extraordinary.

In fact, Central Park East Secondary School has made the extraordinary ordinary. Where it is extraordinary for poor and working-class African-American and Latino students to graduate from high school at high rates, it is ordinary at CPESS. Almost everyone does

it. Where it is extraordinary for high percentages of poor and working-class African-American and Latino students to be admitted to college, it is ordinary at CPESS. Almost everyone does it. At Central Park East Secondary School, students do not have to be extraordinary to have a future. They do not have to be rescued from a destructive school culture or from the communities in which they live in order to have a future. Because, at CPESS, building a future, having a future, is ordinary.

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Chapter 5

Restructuring for Learner-Centered Accountability at University Heights High School

A. Lin Goodwin

Introduction

"Our goal is a school without failure." (University Heights High School Handbook, 1989-90, p.12). Buried in the University Heights High School (UHHS) Handbook, this statement of the institution's grading policy actually extends beyond issues of credits and student assessment; it serves as a statement of the mission of University Heights. This is an institution that is structured and is continually restructuring to achieve learner-centered accountability and the success of all its members. In the story of University Heights, consensus-building and community emerge as dual themes that define and determine educational accountability. Examining the school through these two lenses reveals the processes and structures embedded in the school organization that ensure that members of the school remain responsive to and responsible for each other.¹

Situated in three buildings on the campus of a City University of New York (CUNY) college, University Heights High School opened on February 2, 1987, with 163 students. According to Nancy Mohr, who has served as the principal of the school since its inception, this alternative high school was envisioned as one that would emphasize meeting the needs of the whole child, collaboration between teachers and students, and academic achievement. The school serves ninth- through twelfth-graders and is a member of the Coalition for Essential Schools, headed by Ted Sizer, and the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) in New York City. As with all Coalition members, certain basic principles undergird the workings of the school: *Less is more* -- the curriculum is focused and rendered more fluid

¹ This paper would not have been possible without the generosity of UHHS members. I am grateful to everyone, teachers and students alike, for allowing me to observe in classrooms, meetings and hallways, for speaking candidly with me, and for tolerating the intrusions. In addition, I would like to thank particular individuals who tirelessly answered my many questions and offered valuable assistance, feedback and insight: Nancy Mohr, Brad Stam, Lisa Hirsch, Marion Fuller, Susan Schwartz, Augusto Andres, Suzanne Valenza, Ruth Smith, Nellie Simmons, Carol DiSpagno, and Phil Farnham. Interacting with you and learning from you was my unique pleasure.

through interdisciplinary study; the "application of the wisdom of the group" to decisions through collaboration and cooperation; *student as worker*, where students are actively involved in their own learning and demonstrate understanding through work accomplished; and the *personalization of learning*, which ensures that teachers are intimately involved in the lives of students.

The population of the school consists of 375 students and 26 staff including teachers, paraprofessionals, a guidance counselor, and social workers. The school aims to have no more than 400 students; like other CCE schools, University Heights will remain small in order to avoid compromising the personalness of learning. The organizational structure of the school is complex and multilayered, designed primarily to support human interaction and to further the goals of the school -- building community and reaching consensus. Given the emphasis UHHS places on human beings, it seems appropriate to unfold the complexity of this institution by beginning with an individual student's entry.

A prospective student is likely to be "friend referred,"² testimony to the fact that students in residence apparently believe that the school works. Only about a third of entering students are referred by guidance counselors. A student seeking entry receives an appointment for Group Intake Orientation if he or she is 15 years of age, reads at a sixth-grade (or above) level, and is already enrolled in a high school program. It is important to note that UHHS does not test incoming students but instead relies on reading test scores (if available) from the sending school.

The student, with a parent or guardian, meets first with the intake counselor and other students and parents at the school. This initial meeting is designed to help the prospective student learn about the school and "demonstrate that parental involvement in this choice is a key component of [the] program" (UHHS Handbook, 1989-90, p. 6). Given a positive initial meeting, the prospective student is invited to spend a day on campus with 15 other prospective students. The day is spent attending classes with an assigned "buddy" and participating "in small group discussions about policies and procedures" (UHHS Handbook, 1989-90, p. 6). "Intake day" continues after the visitor leaves when the 21 student representatives and the guidance counselor who make up the Student Intake Team assess the candidates in terms of maturity, positive attitude, genuine interest in the school, and appropriateness of behavior. In effect, students select students. Once accepted to UHHS, the student is on probation for two weeks. During this time, the student and the UHHS community are given further opportunity to ascertain if the fit between the two is a good one. With the exception of a few students who fail to show, this trial period marks entry to UHHS for the majority of the students.

This elaborate process for entry to the school accomplishes several things simultaneously. First, it departs dramatically from typical entry procedures for "regular"

² Quotations not identified by specific documents or publications have been taken verbatim from field notes and interviews with UHSS community members.

New York City high schools and helps to differentiate UHHS as a special, alternative setting. Second, it helps establish UHHS as "a school of choice [not a] refuge or last resort" because all parties are involved in determining "mutually if [UHHS] is the appropriate choice" (UHHS Handbook, 1989-90, p. 6). Third, new students are introduced to UHHS as a community that cooperatively makes important decisions. Thus, new students are immediately socialized into a system where what students and teachers think is valued, a system in which kids and adults work together. Finally, the intake process is earmarked by reaching consensus around the question of community membership. This process empowers students and teachers as policies and structures designed to promote collaboration are affirmed through process. The process reminds them of the responsibility they all hold as members of a community.

Time and Teams: The UHHS Structure

Once accepted to UHHS, students are immediately drawn into a family group, "one of the greatest connecting mechanisms in the school." Every morning at 9:00 a.m., 21 family groups swing into action for an hour. Each family group consists of about 18 students and one teacher and it is within this structure, "the primary, bedrock connection that a student has to the school," that some of the most vital work of the school is accomplished. Family group provides academic support, personal and social counseling, and a forum in which conflicts can be resolved and problems addressed. It is "a supportive group . . . an AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] group." Once assigned to a family group, teacher and students generally stay together for the student's whole school career. Groups are built through random assignment though occasionally they are balanced for gender, race, and "troublemakers." Very rarely do students switch from one group to another; in fact, leaving a family group is "tantamount to a divorce" and happens only as a last resort. "The idea is you've got to work out your problems." Family-group interaction is not reserved solely for this daily 60 minute period. Family groups become the nexus for a variety of other activities and projects; they give individuals a place to be, an "in group." The hallways of the school are decorated with notices of upcoming events sponsored by particular family groups, photos of family-groups involved in community service, posters pronouncing family-group achievements. Membership looms large in this school; people belong. Everyone is reminded that this is a community.

Research on high school dropouts has found that alienation from school life has a negative impact on school persistence (see, for example, Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock, 1986). For kids who describe themselves as "cutting addicts," who were truant from their previous schools for a month at a time, family group demands individual accountability. The situation is different from the anonymity typical of large, comprehensive high schools. Students are known at UHHS; when they are absent, they violate the trust of friends. What

they do, whether positive or negative, does not go unnoticed; each action becomes a reflection of both the individual and the collective. In turn, the group is responsible for providing support, nurturing, and a sense of identity to each member. The lesson that students learn is that caring about others means being answerable to them.

Between 10:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon, students and teachers meet in seminars. All teachers and students belong to one of three teams: Team Spirit, Total Team, and Team Visiones. Each team has six to 12 teachers and about 100 students. Each team contains two seminars, which are team taught by two to four teachers who have elected to work with one another. Each of the six seminars is interdisciplinary in nature, responds to different modalities, and is thematically organized. The curriculum is teacher/team-created with heavy input from the students. Pedagogical decisions are determined primarily by the students' needs and interests and secondarily by state mandates. Examples of seminar themes include "SCOOP" or Journalism, which integrates English, American History, Global History, Economics, Mathematics, and Spanish; "Adventures in New Jack [York] City," combining English, Art, Mathematics, American Studies, Economics, and Physical Education; and "Law and Disorder," including integration of English, Science, Spanish, Physical Education, and American Studies (see Figure 1).

Students choose the seminar they will attend and are, in essence, heterogeneously and randomly assigned. The process of student programming, however, must take into account graduation requirements and academic needs. Students with the most credits and, therefore, the least amount of flexibility are given first preference. Students with fewer credits, while less likely to get their first choice, have time on their side.

Lunch comes at noon. While UHHS does have its own cafeteria, services are somewhat limited so students are free to eat off-campus or in the CUNY college cafeteria. While UHHS and CUNY have managed to achieve a state of "peaceful coexistence," the relationship between the two institutions is fragile and loosely defined. When UHHS was born, there was, apparently, an expectation on the part of the college that UHHS would be similar to an elite public high school for the gifted that is affiliated with another CUNY campus in Manhattan. UHHS staff had to deal with what seemed to be the college's implicit assumption that it was charged with reforming this "terrible high school," an assumption that created communication gaps between teachers and college faculty. There have also been some tensions between college and high school students with, according to UHHS students, some college students expressing resentment at UHHS's presence on campus and agitating for the institution to be placed elsewhere. UHHS has responded by maintaining a lower profile and trying to integrate itself into the college community. There is a liaison to the college and UHHS students use college facilities like the gym, the library, and the pool. A few UHHS students even take CUNY college courses for high school or college credit. While the situation is not optimal, UHHS kids are "no longer being blamed for every disturbance or problem on campus." Overall, the relationship between the two institutions is stronger and continues to improve, given the efforts of both college and school personnel.

University Heights High School at Bronx Community College

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES--SPRING, 1992

8-9 AM-Physical Education-Gym-Tuesday, Thursday and Friday
 8:30 AM- Staff Meeting
 9-10 AM-Family Groups Meet
 10-12 AM Morning Seminars
 12-1 PM-Lunch, Tutoring in Computer Rooms
 1-3 PM-Afternoon Seminars/Individual Classes

Tuesdays 2-3 Tutorials, HIV-AIDS Peer Educators, Lisa
 2-4 Multicultural Club, Deborah
 3-4 College Board, Nancy and Michele
 Mathematics Coordination--Susan

Team Spirit-Dinah Team Leader

Tech II Building

Seminar: S.P.A.C.E. All Day
 (Special Projects Accessing Cerebral Energy)
 Art, Music, English, Global Studies
 and Karate/Swimming

Peter
 Steve
 Diane
 Ruth

Seminar: SCOOP (Journalism) All Day
 English, American History, Global History,
 Economics, Mathematics, Spanish

Dinah
 Lisa
 Ellis
 Miguel

Total Team-Marion Team Leader

Tech II Building

Seminar: The American Dream-AM or PM
 American History, English, Mathematics,
 Economics and Art

Michael
 Marion
 Judy
 Michele

Seminar: Law and Disorder-AM or PM
 English, Science, Spanish, Physical Education,
 American Studies

Gus
 Nellie
 Carol
 Peter
 Francisco

Team Visiones-Suzanne Team Leader

Nicholas Hall

**Seminar: Adventures in New Jack City-
 All Day**
 English, Art, Mathematics, American Studies,
 Economics and Physical Education

Suzanne
 Bradley
 Augusto
 Peter

Seminar: Sex, Drugs and Power-All Day
 Global Studies, English, Mathematics, Art,
 Science, Health and Physical Education

Paul
 Evelyn
 Linda
 Luis
 Risa

Figure 1.

Classes resume in the afternoon though the configuration varies from team to team. The two seminars offered by Team Visiones -- "Adventures in New Jack City" and "Sex, Drugs and Power" -- work with the same students, continuing as they were in the morning, fully integrated and interdisciplinary. Team Spirit continues one seminar -- "SCOOP" -- through the afternoon but, in the place of the second seminar, offers "singleton" classes more reminiscent of those in typical high schools. The Total Team seminars -- "The American Dream," and "Law and Disorder" -- exchange students in the afternoon and so repeat what they offered in the morning but for a different audience.

What may appear to be messy scheduling or inconsistent practice is actually restructuring in action. The current team structure has been in place only since September 1991. Before that time, students were assigned to one of four academic teams, each of which was designated a specific skill level or tier. Tier One consisted of students who had not yet passed the Regents Competency Tests (RCTs); two of the four academic teams were on Tier One. Tier Two consisted of students who had passed the RCTs and were working on passing the CUNY assessment exams; one of the four academic teams was on Tier Two. The last academic team, on Tier Three, consisted of college-ready students, analogous perhaps to advanced-placement students. The academic teams on Tiers one and two each had about 110 students, who worked with a self-selected professional team of six teachers, paraprofessionals, and other support personnel -- for example, a social worker. The exception was the small college-ready group, which worked with one teacher rather than a team. Teams met in the morning during seminar time, a two-hour period from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m., which emphasized interdisciplinary study and team instruction. In the afternoon, a more traditionally subject-oriented approach to curriculum design and instruction was employed with each teacher offering two classes three times a week. There was a potpourri of offerings from the single subject (math, French), to the integrated subject (art/literature), to the thematic (family life), to the specialty class (future teachers). In essence, an ideological dichotomy existed in the curriculum between learner-centeredness and integration and subject-centeredness and separation.

The decision by one team to experiment became the impetus for the change in team structure. During spring 1991, one team (now Team Visiones) opted to extend the interdisciplinary nature of morning seminar and keep their group of students for the entire day. As a pilot, the change -- though a major one -- was smoothly implemented until a second team voiced their desire to do likewise. This raised several dilemmas. First, if two teams kept their students all day, it would mean that the remaining team, of non-college ready students, would, by default, have to follow suit. Thus, the third team felt pressured to go along, which was antithetical to consensus-building. A second concern was meeting the needs of the seniors. The need for seniors to be in a group of their own conflicted with the need to spread the seniors around because of the "real value in having the benefit of their experience" in seminars. The suggestion that the team that originally adopted the all-day seminar form terminate their pilot and allow another team to have a chance met with dissatisfaction, since the first team was not ready to end while the second was anxious to

begin. A third dilemma was meeting the needs of the advanced students. There was a concern that the all-day seminar would hold advanced students back. Yet the tier system meant that some teachers were always working with the less-skilled students; they could not benefit from having heterogeneous groups that would include more mature, accomplished students.

The essential question in the debate became whether the tier system really helped teachers personalize learning or whether it was, in fact, tracking in disguise. The concern was that "we always talk about the needs of the advanced [students]" when a pedagogical change is recommended. Research data were introduced into the debate, data that helped convince most of the staff that heterogeneous groups would benefit both advanced and less advanced students. "A moral sense began to pervade [that] . . . all [the] students need special challenges"; the few still opposed to changing the team structure decided to "compromise to keep the peace" and the current structure was implemented.

This vignette of change at UHHS illustrates the back and forth that is the very essence of consensus-building. This process took all of spring 1991, indicative of UHHS's commitment to participatory decision making over majority rule. "The thing about the vote is that it is only a short term timesaver, but a long term aggravation." Consensus-building leaves each person "feeling like a stakeholder . . . we learn more and more that we go a long way to affect people positively if they are included before." Thus, group decisions demand individual accountability, even when one does not entirely agree with the final outcome, because of the inclusive nature of the decision-making process. In addition, since evaluation "is part of what happens naturally," new ideas never go unassessed. "One of [UHHS's] outs is to say, see how it goes"; change is neither prescribed nor mandated. Thus, individual variations within an overall framework -- such as the different afternoon seminar arrangements -- emerge naturally. The organic nature of change at UHHS, while time-consuming and untidy, ensures that everyone is involved and everyone "lives with" decisions.

The layout of the daily calendar of the school reveals the structures that organize work, individuals, and time. The support for the school's philosophy of "no failure" is apparent in implicit messages about collaboration and teamwork among teachers, learning as an interdisciplinary endeavor, student choice and involvement in learning, the primacy of face-to-face interaction, group energy toward common goals, and a community of intimately connected friends. However, ensuring that neither students nor teachers fall between the cracks depends also on a less immediately visible infrastructure. The macro structures designed to support consensus and community building are supported by a series of finely defined regularities, policies, and processes. These become the framework that fosters individual accountability, encourages community caring, and facilitates personal involvement in the life of the school.

Accountability at UHHS: An Intricate Communication Loop

The student intake team, the family groups, and the seminar teams form the first layer of communication structures at UHHS. As the foundation of all that occurs at the school, they serve crucial functions related to student entry, curriculum and instruction, and student support. A second layer of structures and policies ensures that these groups are isolated neither from the larger mission of the school nor from one another. Consequently, these groups all feed into two schoolwide bodies -- the Fairness Committee and the Senate.

Based on Kohlberg's theory of a "Just Community" (Kohlberg, 1981), the Fairness Committee exists not to make judgments or punish infractions, but to consider problems brought by any UHHS member and recommend constructive solutions. The Fairness Committee does not mandate action but rather works "towards win-win solutions rather than seeking out 'punishments' for offenders" (UHHS Handbook, 1989-90, p. 22). As an objective think-tank for justice, this committee helps to mediate difficulties and resolve conflicts. Each of the 21 family groups is represented on the Fairness Committee by two student members, one of whom is the regular member, the other an alternate. Working with one teacher, the student representatives comprise the committee and become information conduits between the Fairness Committee and family groups. Conflicts between UHHS members can become the focus of Fairness Committee discussions. However, the committee does not limit itself to personal conflicts and may consider academic disputes, problems arising from the greater community, or any individual case. While family groups are the site for wrestling with personal issues, the Fairness Committee is the place in which issues that affect the entire UHHS community are resolved. It is important to note that UHHS encourages members to first attempt to resolve difficulties by talking through disagreements on a one-to-one basis and engaging in conflict resolution -- sometimes with the help of a mediator who can be any community member. Personal responsibility is emphasized. Thus, the Fairness Committee is part of a continuum of accountability in place at UHHS, which always begins at the individual level.

While the Fairness Committee deals with specific issues on a case-by-case basis, discussion of specific issues sometimes begs a reworking of school policy to inform and guide the daily workings of the school and the lives of its members. The Senate consists of one teacher, the principal, and, again, two student representatives (one plus an alternate) from each family group, and serves as a policy-generating body for the school. Student representatives do not make decisions for their group but are responsible for relaying family group ideas to the Senate and integrating the best thinking of their peers into any Senate discussion.

Communication between the two bodies flows in both directions as proposals are suggested and modified, ideas are considered and rejected, and new information or

perspectives are injected into the discussion. Unlike the process in the Fairness Committee, the Senate does not make decisions; all recommendations are fed back to family groups for deliberation. Thus, the Fairness Committee is the judicial system at UHHS, while the Senate oversees school governance, though the work of the two is closely linked, with the Senate frequently galvanized into action by issues considered by the Fairness Committee. Basketball-game decorum is a recent example. School pride had degenerated into poor sportsmanship, with UHHS students taunting the visiting team, and conflict between UHHS students and opposing team supporters at basketball games. While the Fairness Committee dealt with specific incidents of poor behavior, the Senate made recommendations for schoolwide policy that would govern behavior at all games. This resulted in a policy that dictated behavioral contracts for basketball games.

The work of both committees, as well as that of student intake, family groups, and seminar teams, is informed by a decision-making model that begins with discussion, which leads to the framing of a proposal. There is then a call for consensus around the proposal, which is adopted if consensus is reached. If there is no consensus, the process recycles with new proposals until consensus is achieved. Consensus at UHHS is defined as "willingness to go along with a decision, but not necessarily total agreement," a "can you live with it?" philosophy that is considered preferable to voting, "which generally implies a minority is left which is unhappy with a decision" (UHHS Handbook, 1989-90, p. 13). It is important here to indicate that the Fairness and Senate committees do not just respond to crises. While serious issues brought to both take precedence in the weekly hour-long meetings, each committee operates according to a standing agenda that emphasizes building the skills of committee members as mediators, problem-solvers, and resolvers of conflict. The turnkey approach is utilized when student representatives take their skills back to family group and share what they have learned with their peers and with their family-group teacher/leader. While student representatives play key roles in family-group discussions and conflicts, they are not the only ones with the ability to lead the group toward positive solutions and constructive alternatives.

Student intake, family groups, seminar teams, the Senate, and the Fairness Committee envelop the University Heights community like arms. Each individual is given a voice through each structure, each process. The UHHS community provides daily practice in democratic participation, personal accountability, and negotiation as members try new strategies to work through issues and learn to trust their own authority. The emphasis on community and consensus-building transmits powerful messages to students and teachers alike: Individual opinion and perspective count; thinking and talking are always the route to conflict resolution; people care about people; responsibility means being part of the solution; collective wisdom is more powerful, more creative than the thinking of one; peaceful coexistence requires mutually agreed upon rules. This is the intended yet implicit curriculum of UHHS. However, ensuring that each member of the UHHS community achieves success, keeping each individual from falling between the cracks, requires more than participatory decision making. It requires an intricate network of safeguards.

Filling in the Cracks: The Safety Net at UHHS

Every year, Hollywood celebrities participate in "The Circus of the Stars." Movie actors unskilled and inexperienced in circus arts are transformed into circus performers after a brief period of training. Without the aid of trick photography they walk the high wire, balance on the backs of galloping horses, and sail through the air on the trapeze. One reason they can successfully, in a few weeks, acquire skills that take years to perfect is that they practice with safety nets. The presence of safety nets lowers the consequence of failure and of mistakes. Stars are, presumably, emboldened as they leap out to grab the trapeze swing; they know that failure merely means an opportunity to try again. Not only does the safety net wait to embrace them if they fall, but around their waists are safety lines that will lessen the impact of the fall. Doubly protected, the stars cannot help but be encouraged to try, to risk, to try again. The entire training situation is deliberately arranged to ensure their success.

At UHHS, the committee and team structures in place are analogous to a permanent safety net. They are set up to break the fall of any member of the UHHS family. Their existence lets everyone know that the well-being of each person is critical. Beyond the safety net, there are also safety lines attached to students and teachers. These safety lines are the regularities embedded in the institution -- rules, processes, and procedures -- that are designed to ensure success. Like the movie stars training for the circus, risk-taking and persistence on the part of students and teachers are supported. In essence, these safety lines become incentives to aim for positive behavior and good practices which are therefore more likely to occur.

Safety Lines for Students

Creating an environment that will give chronic truants a reason to come to (and stay in) school each day means building a support structure that is forgiving and flexible, one in which small steps can accumulate into noticeable rewards. At UHHS, the supportive structure begins with contracts proposed by teachers and agreed to by students. Contracts are "negotiable instruments" (UHHS Handbook, 1989-90, p. 7) in which the obligations of both teachers and students are spelled out. "Teachers and students must agree on what is going to be accomplished and how it is going to be accomplished if there is to be genuine learning taking place in the classroom" (UHHS Handbook, 1989-90, p.7). Accountability means knowing what the parameters and obligations are.

To meet the terms of the contracts, students earn points for everything they do. This includes attendance, being on time, completing assignments, participating in family group, and behaving appropriately in class. Points are collected in cycles, with each cycle lasting four weeks. Each semester has four cycles, for a total of eight cycles per year. Two

hundred points equal one credit; during each school year, students have the opportunity to earn, on average, 15 credits. Students may also earn additional credits by attending night or summer school, or engaging in independent study. Points and cycles seem to accomplish several things.

(1) Points translate into tangible indicators of student progress and achievement and undoubtedly provide immediate gratification to students.

(2) Cycles break up the semesters so that the distance between goal-setting and goal-accomplishment narrows; students need not forgo gratification for too long.

(3) The point system allows students to earn partial credit; every bit of effort is rewarded.

If a student has a good start but loses momentum half way through, he or she does not forfeit the points that were earned earlier and can make up the points that have been lost. This contrasts with typical high schools where early efforts cannot compensate for later inertia. At UHHS, where "most of our kids don't get full credit in anything," it is not over even when it is over.

When a student gets into academic trouble, his or her case is first discussed in family group, where a new contract is drawn up. If the contract does not work, the student undergoes a peer-review process in which students, parents, and teachers join in a "genuine conference . . . [which is] truly open-ended . . . [and] puts everybody's head together to see the best direction." The peer review sets a course of action that, if the student continues at UHHS, will probably indicate a "programmatic shift, not more of the same" so that the likelihood of success is heightened.

Woven into the safety net and the safety lines is simple caring. In this organization, students and teachers know one another. Any visitor to the school will notice immediately the comfortable casualness that exists between students and teachers. Everyone is on a first name basis; teachers linger in the hallways and exchange anecdotes with students; students crowd into teachers' offices for advice and to use the phone. When asked what they like about UHHS, the kids are very clear: "In any other school they don't have the time to get to you. Here, teachers greet you in the halls, they're reaching out right there!" "Togetherness," "a big family," "more attention," characterize the relationships between teachers and students. The caring that is so obvious is also demanding; it demands accountability. This accountability means that students know that teachers "put it up to me . . . they give you responsibility." It also means that when students are absent or "in academic suffering," teachers take it as "a personal failure on [their] part if for some reason a student is ignored or something happens to them."

Every year, one third of the students can participate in "Project Adventure," a wilderness experience of sorts, where they camp and complete rope and obstacle courses.

The primary aim of the experience is to "teach [students] to trust each other, rely on each other." Preparation for the trip is integrated into physical education activities. In the gym, kids learn how to harness themselves properly, how to "spot" for their partners, how to shimmy across two parallel ropes suspended 30 feet above the gym floor, how to hold on tight to a peer's safety line. Each crossing of the ropes is accompanied by encouragement and directions from the ground. Each reluctant participant is cajoled and pushed until he or she joins in. Each "safe crossing" is celebrated with noisy whoops and cheers. Each descent is guided by several pairs of hands on the safety line. Each person then closes the experience with a piece of reflective writing. In preparing for "Project Adventure," students and teachers enact, in a concrete, visible way, the safety net and lines at UHHS. This gym exercise is symbolic of how the community works together, of how the community seeks to define itself. It demonstrates that there are reluctant players; not everyone is equally invested in every idea. But the encouragement of the group leads individuals to take chances toward the common good, chances they might never have taken alone.

Safety Lines for Teachers

The team and seminar structure at UHHS requires collaboration. To support this collaboration and to break the isolation so inherent in teaching, teachers are also tied to each other by several structures. First, each team meets for collaborative planning once a week for an hour; in addition, teachers in the same seminar can meet weekly for two hours of planning. These meetings, for which teachers are compensated, take place after school. While the meetings send a clear message about the priority instructional planning takes, the compensation helps teachers feel that their time, as well as the work they do, is valued. Once a week, for two hours, there is a full staff meeting devoted primarily to policy issues and staff development. Mohr also meets with new teachers once a week during their first year to give them additional support. Finally, nitty-gritty issues that often interfere with substantive discussions are dealt with at daily meetings that bring the staff together at 8:30 a.m. For 15 minutes, announcements and procedures, which keep everyone on top of details, are shared. This is unlike the typical staff meeting at most schools, in that pedagogy and administrative trivia do not have to compete for time during the same space. The conflict that can arise between management and teaching issues is avoided simply by allowing more and dedicated time.

During the morning staff meeting, *MOHRNOTES*, a daily newsletter put out by the principal, is also distributed. Both students and staff can contribute to the newsletter, which is used to welcome visitors to UHHS (this seems to be a daily occurrence), offer congratulations or birthday wishes, announce special events, or ask for staff feedback on specific questions.

At times, the newsletter will ask family groups to discuss particular issues, usually in response to an incident that has occurred:

Please discuss in FG [family group]: There was an incident which involved

students in our school throwing snow balls at one another and at college students. Obviously, this is out of line. Since some of the students did not respond to requests to stop, there will be serious interventions taking place. [The Guidance Counselor] will be holding the conferences -- contracts will be drawn. (*MOHRNOTES*, March 23, 1992)

At other times, the newsletter will suggest an essential question for the day: "Is tagging papers which we have put on the walls (notices, posters, etc.) OK/respectful as long as someone is not writing directly on the wall itself???" (*MOHRNOTES*, March 16, 1992). In the first instance, the newsletter is used to publicly decry poor behavior and to draw the entire community into discussing the issue. In the second, *MOHRNOTES* invites the community to consider an issue that is not quite a violation of school policy (i.e., no graffiti on the walls), but is questionably appropriate nonetheless.

Thus, while the morning meeting generally helps connect staff to administrative details, *MOHRNOTES* focuses on connecting everyone to issues and to each other. It serves as a powerful accountability tool because it reminds the members of UHHS of their responsibilities to one another, particularly the responsibility of teachers to students. This is demonstrated clearly in the daily attendance roster in the newsletter. The roster lists the absentees for the previous school day as reported by each family-group advisor. During the morning meeting, teachers check their family group list again for accuracy and indicate any names that should be added to or taken off the list. The names of teachers who do not submit an attendance list are listed at the end. Teachers who have full attendance are cheered; teachers without attendance lists are gently reminded. This practice was started because "staff felt kids were falling between the cracks"; they were not sure if they were keeping track. Apparently, this practice has helped to raise consciousness and has helped teachers become more accountable. Without reprimands or punitive measures, teachers are "embarrassed" if they have too many absences simply because the newsletter keeps "pointing out that success can happen . . . without anyone having to be explicit about it." This "changes your belief about what's possible."

The idea of demonstrating or modeling what is possible in order to encourage good practices seems pervasive. *MOHRNOTES* serves as a concrete example of how the UHHS community sets standards. Individual teachers do this as well. Annually, each teacher has a goal-setting conference with the principal. These individual standards become grist for additional self-evaluation conferences with the principal. Individual accountability is a potent theme undergirding the work of the community. It is inherent in the student contracts, in family group -- where "the family group teacher is accountable, ultimately, for the performance of the student," and in the team structure, because "the whole team atmosphere tends to build within the individual [teacher] an attention to, an interest in what other teachers are doing." Consequently, the team structure becomes a critical support system for teachers.

Through team teaching and planning, "cross-fertilization" occurs and "different stereotypes are diluted as opposed to reinforced." Learning "come[s] from teaching with more experienced teachers in their classroom and being able to interact with them outside and plan courses with them." Just as *MOHRNOTES* becomes a mirror that staff can hold up to attendance rates, teachers within teams become mirrors for one another's practice; team work means teachers model for each other what is possible. In essence, teachers become mentors for one another and "provide proteges with a sense of what they are becoming" (Anderson and Shannon, 1988, p. 40).

Teacher development and evaluation are also built into the team structure. Each team is assigned a peer coach whose purpose is to reinforce good practice. Coaches conduct classroom observations -- given participants' agreement and observation guidelines established by each team -- and disseminate information such as "the latest information on teaching techniques." They are also the people "teachers go to if they are having trouble in the classroom." Coaches are peer-selected team members, and are given "comp" time to work with teachers. Teachers may "invite coaches to participate in their evaluation." Coaches also engage in "conversations about teaching" and "get teachers talking." However, any write-ups completed by the coaches go into teachers' files only if the teachers in question agree. This helps to preserve the delicate dual role coaches play as peers and in helping teachers.

Teacher evaluation is a three-part system that involves the individual's self-evaluation, an evaluation by a peer, and the evaluation by the peer coach and/or Mohr. Assessment is a thoughtful process aided by reflective writing, intervisitations (across teams, classes), and videotaping. These strategies are not standardized, however, and depend on "practicality," what time will allow, and individual choice.

For teachers "who are having problems, whether it's problems in the classroom or problems fulfilling their other roles," the first level of intervention is always at the person-person level. Accountability at UHHS means that individual teachers take it on themselves to "confront" each other. "Individuals are expected to hold other individuals accountable for the carrying out of [UHHS's] policies/procedures" (*Staff Accountability Proposal*).³ No doubt this is difficult to do, yet the idea of personal accountability so prevalent at UHHS leads teachers to "really try" to meet this expectation. The next level of intervention is the team. "The team is accountable for members' success and intervenes in order to achieve this." The team works in ways designed to support the individual and to support change. If further intervention is necessary, the team may recommend to the principal that a peer review be set up. Peer review is "a last resort process . . . that involves . . . peers and not just the direct supervisory review type of thing."

All involved agree on the makeup of the three-staff member Peer Review Committee.

³ All documents without specific citations represent UHHS in-school publications.

The committee creates a contract specifying actions and behavioral changes. "If the contract is not met, the Peer Review Committee may recommend a change of responsibility for the person involved" (*Staff Accountability Proposal*). The seriousness of peer review as a last resort is underscored by the words of one teacher:

I think the whole staff is committed to keeping people that have gone through the hiring process because if you're accepted through the hiring process, we think you're capable of teaching in the school. Unless something goes terribly wrong, we want to do our best to make sure you are thriving at the school.

"Several teachers have gone through it [peer review] on their way out of the school. However, whatever the outcome, the mismatch [between the person and the school] is stressed versus the teacher is a bad teacher or a bad person."

In bureaucratically managed systems, the idea of self- (or reflective) evaluation may appear soft, inconsistent, and inefficient. Leaving evaluation to those who are to be evaluated may seem to be a contradiction in terms. Yet the teacher evaluation process at UHHS seems far from soft and, in fact, demands that teachers attend not just to their own growth but to the growth of their peers. The seriousness of peer review illustrates how the UHHS community stands on its convictions and participates in identifying the problem, working through the problem, and guiding the person out of the community only after all avenues are exhausted. This is a painful process, one that usually only those "in charge" (in schools, the principal or director) see to fruition. At UHHS, everyone is "in charge." Staff members cannot hide behind the usual platitudes that shield us from others' pain or detrimental actions -- "I didn't realize"; "I didn't know how to approach him"; "I had heard rumors but I didn't think they were true"; "I have no right to interfere"; "I knew what was going on but it wasn't my responsibility." Teacher ownership of the evaluative process is not easy, but it means that the community understands it sinks or swims together.

Performance-Based Assessment: The Next Step in Building Professional Accountability System

In January 1992, UHHS took a definitive step in their process of building professional accountability. At a CCE conference, four seniors presented their portfolios for public assessment in a segment entitled *Inviting Diverse Voices to the Roundtable*. Each student exhibited work related to a specific domain -- Effective Expression and Communication, Social Interaction and Effective Citizenship, Cultural and Historical Involvement, and Self-Awareness and Self-Esteem. Though the process is far from complete, the exhibition served as a culmination of sorts, a tangible outcome of a move toward performance-based assessment that began over a year ago.

It is January 1991, and the whole UHHS staff body is at a camp/resort in upstate New York on their annual midyear retreat. Rather than have several short-term professional development activities scattered throughout the year, Mohr pools funds to subsidize a weekend retreat for the entire staff. This allows them to really spend time together wrestling with issues that require more than an afternoon's worth of attention.

It is Saturday morning and the teams are meeting to discuss an article that everyone read the night before. The article is "constructive and instructive" because it describes how one institution, in this case a college, has "developed and explicitly spelled out the kinds of broad-based outcomes" UHHS is trying also to develop. After the discussion and sharing, the teams break into six smaller groups. Each group is charged with figuring out, as specifically as possible, outcomes for one of six broad, long-term goals. The walls are plastered with newsprint listing the six goals and offering a record of previous discussions and brainstorming sessions about indicators of achievement. Clearly, much work has been done prior to the retreat; the indicators have been categorized according to sources -- student self-assessment, teacher assessment, and peer observations -- and types: products or performances. Indicators are marked in black where "tangible evidence is available but may need to be collected," or green if "the indicator is intangible still and documentary evidence does not exist." While the retreat provides dedicated time, work on performance-based assessment has been an ongoing part of UHHS life.

In the groups, teachers struggle to define "levels" of outcomes, to establish achievement hierarchies, and to link outcomes with indicators. The discussion is spirited and jocular, but sprinkled liberally with questions and concerns, which are voiced during the group sharing time. Teachers who have served as group facilitators field the concerns by reminding everyone that, "we're playing with this at this point . . . stay limited at this point." It is suggested that teams might want to pilot particular outcomes. The process would begin with a team choosing an outcome, breaking it into levels (what students will be able to do), and establishing indicators of success (how teachers will know students know). "The main question is, how can we turn green (intangibles) to black (tangibles)?" When this seems to be too large a task, teams are encouraged to "pick something" -- one level, one indicator -- to start small; after all, "everything up there (indicators) came from us."

The morning ends with each person reflecting on and writing about his or her feelings in terms of the session's activities. Even visitors are asked to think, write, and then join the whole-group sharing of "snippets" of thoughts. The snippets range from the philosophical to the pragmatic and reveal teacher concerns, concerns about students, reticence, and whole-hearted agreement:

--Can we condense this [process] so it is simpler? Sometimes the abstractions get to me.

--I would like to hear the kids say "I can do it" instead of "At least

I tried."

--I have a philosophical response, but I confess at one point I thought "what are they going to want, a file folder or brown envelopes?"

--Huh?

--This will be a better way of judging how students got to x point.

--I'm not sure how this will impact on my everyday classroom . . . someone will have to adopt me.

--This is short notice for this kind of assessment.

--We are preserving our ideals as well as looking at logistics; this is exciting.

--How do I keep records? How much weight is given to each level? How do we handle heterogeneous classes? What do we do if a level is not attained?

Change is never easy. Each comment, each question is received respectfully by the group. The freedom with which everyone expresses her or his thoughts is illustrative of the trust this group of professionals seems to have in one another. There is no sense of going along with the crowd, of "correct" or unpopular responses. The honesty of the group is palpable. These people care enough to be frank.

Trying On New Roles

Experimentation and field-testing seem to grow naturally out of structural or pedagogical discussions at UHHS. This is not an institution that speaks rhetorically. The value that the institution places on learning is expressed in its rejection of standardization and uniformity; the understanding seems to be that change and progress take time and look messy. The retreat became the impetus for piloting several new ideas -- portfolio assessment, all-day seminars, and interactive report cards. During spring 1991, Team Visiones experimented with keeping new students who were assigned to Tier One. The rationale was that students new to the community would benefit from the continuous support, orientation, and mentoring that remaining with one team of teachers would provide. The team collaboratively redesigned the curriculum and started the process of building portfolios of student work. This process was supported by an explicit guideline of portfolio construction beginning with project proposals and culminating in aesthetically pleasing products.

The changing definition of assessment resulted in a corresponding change in the way assessment results were reported. The interactive report cards became a tool for dialogue about student growth, a conversation that would engage the teacher, the student, and the

parent. The three-part report begins with a student's self-assessment; it is then passed to the teacher for his or her evaluative comments and, finally, the parent reads and reacts to the report card before returning it to the school. Unlike traditional report cards, which are primarily quantitative, presume that evaluative feedback moves in one direction from school to home, and require "policing" through parent sign-offs, these report cards require each party to deliberately think about assessment and involve themselves in the process in a thoughtful, substantive way.

While the team saw interactive report cards as their "attempt to learn more about the kids from the process," they also began to learn more about themselves as "sticky points" naturally arose. In "putting [themselves] much more on the line by putting it [evaluation] into words," teachers began to see that it is "tough . . . to deal with the fuzziness," that they had to be mindful of "writing inappropriate stuff about kids." They also had to consider how the process "might be intimidating to parents who don't write well or at all," and began to realize too that through the use of grades, they sometimes made "silent judgments . . . about kids" in the past.

In an institution in which teachers and staff are responsible for "most everything," and self-assessment is continuous, as opposed to periodic, those who create and initiate are also those who work through the wrinkles. Despite the dilemmas, the performance-based assessment pilot was educative to those who were integrally involved and who, in turn, modeled what was possible to their colleagues. The success of one team encouraged another team to join in the experiment, which transformed it "from . . . a pilot to a decision the school need [ed] to make." Whole-school discussions led to the decision to change the team and seminar structure and to heterogeneously group the students as described earlier. The team's work with portfolios also encouraged the other teams to begin collecting samples of student work and to try narrative report cards. The success of their work is concretely evident in the first student exhibitions that introduced this vignette of UHHS's journey toward professional accountability.

Final Thoughts

Currently, educational accountability is largely enforced through bureaucratic mechanisms ensuring that "rules will be promulgated and compliance with these rules will be monitored" (Darling-Hammond, 1989, p. 63). Standardization is prized and compliance becomes the benchmark of accountability. Conversely, professional accountability fosters policies, practices, safeguards, and incentives designed to promote good practice, minimize harmful practice, and provide structures to identify, diagnose, and modify courses of action that do not support student learning. In essence, accountability becomes the cornerstone of

the professionalization of teaching and improved educational opportunities for students. As a case of professional accountability, UHHS strives to achieve learner-centeredness and person-centeredness through community, consensus-building, and the empowerment of individuals to initiate change.

Community

According to Nel Noddings, "many of our schools are in what might be called a crisis of caring" (Noddings, 1984, p. 181). Through an emphasis on community and membership, UHHS creates an ethos of caring that minimizes the possibility of individuals' slipping between the cracks of professional practice. Through community, members become stakeholders in the educational enterprise; their loyalty and allegiance to the institution are built on the human bonds they form with one another. This ethos of caring demands individual responsibility for the welfare of fellow community members. Structures such as family group, the Fairness Committee, student intake, and seminar teams enable community members to define positive practice, ameliorate harmful practice, and work toward the common good. Thus, decisions at UHHS emphasize persons rather than rules. This creates an atmosphere where "caring has a chance to be initiated in the one-caring and completed in the one cared-for" (Noddings, 1984, p. 182).

Consensus-Building

The idea of membership is furthered by a philosophical orientation toward consensus-building that invites individual participation in decision-making. By giving each member a voice in what occurs, UHHS acts on the maxim that "it is morally correct to include everyone in on decisions which affect them" (UHHS document, *Getting to Consensus*), and secures each person's commitment to deal with the issue at hand. Through the dual processes of consensus-building and community, personal disagreements are either overcome or held at abeyance; members, at the very least, are willing to "live with" decisions and give changes a chance because they understand that the rationale for each change is improved practice. Change through consensus-building means that decisions tap the creative intellectual energy of the community and are allowed to have an impact. Consensus-building also ensures that poor practices do not remain unexamined.

A role in decision making alone, however, is insufficient without a way to link the different factions that occur in any organization. UHHS is not a place where one's part in decision making is constrained by one's place in the organization. Thus, students do not just consider "student" issues; likewise teachers do not have a hand in only those areas designated teacher domains. Rather, UHHS has created a series of "boundary-spanning" groups with "sufficient power and authority in [their] constitutional frame to compel actions and support from participating parties" (Schlechty and Whitford, 1988, p. 194). Thus, group membership is not defined hierarchically but is fluid; parents and students sit on the policy council, teachers participate in the administrative committee, students and teachers work

together in the Fairness Committee (see Figure 2). Through consensus-building, each person helps define the mission of UHHS.

Individual Empowerment

At one Senate meeting, UHHS students were hosting a contingent from an alternative school in Connecticut. The two groups of students spent most of the meeting exchanging information and describing how things worked at their respective schools. At one point, a Connecticut visitor asked incredulously, "Basically, you guys run the school?" The UHHS students agreed, saying, "We give our opinions about things." "They [teachers] don't just make rules...we got to have some say so." "If we disapprove, they'll try to modify it."

These statements are powerful indicators of the role students feel they play in what occurs at the school. The commitment to school decisions happens because they are truly *school* decisions. The sense one receives from the students is that they feel empowered, they make choices, they place their mark on the life of the school.

This sense of ownership is prevalent among teachers too. During the eighteen-month period of data collection, I had many occasions to listen to teachers' informal talk. The most striking characteristic of these conversations was an explicit focus on students, instruction, and reflection on practice. The structures for decision making, collaboration, consensus, and participatory action at UHHS allow teachers to "become confused about subjects they are supposed to 'know' and as they have tried to work their way out of their confusions, they have also begun to think differently about teaching and learning" (Schon, 1983, p. 67).

Change at UHHS does not occur for change's sake but rather is integrally tied to moral, human, and instructional dilemmas. Thus, the discussions that grew out of the reorganization of teams/tiers concentrated on how old and new ways of doing things redefined *learners and the learning-teaching process*, rather than on management issues like scheduling or coverage. In bureaucratically arranged accountability systems, the "trickle down theory of knowledge" separates conception from execution because "information descends from individuals at the pinnacle of the hierarchical pyramid, far removed from schools, and slowly makes it way down to teachers at the implementation level" (Darling-Hammond and Goodwin, 1993, p. 40). In a professionally arranged accountability system such as UHHS, those perceived as most able to make decisions about teaching are those closest to practice -- teachers.

In some ways, the title of this case study is misleading. When one speaks of restructuring, the assumption is usually that an existing structure has been reconfigured and has undergone some sort of metamorphic process. In the case of UHHS, this assumption is, in part, erroneous. University Heights High School is *not* a *restructured* school because no previous (or different) structure existed; UHHS has always been "restructured." But the use of the word *restructuring* is deliberate -- UHHS is an institution that is continuously reexamining its practice and its purpose. The premium the institution places on individual

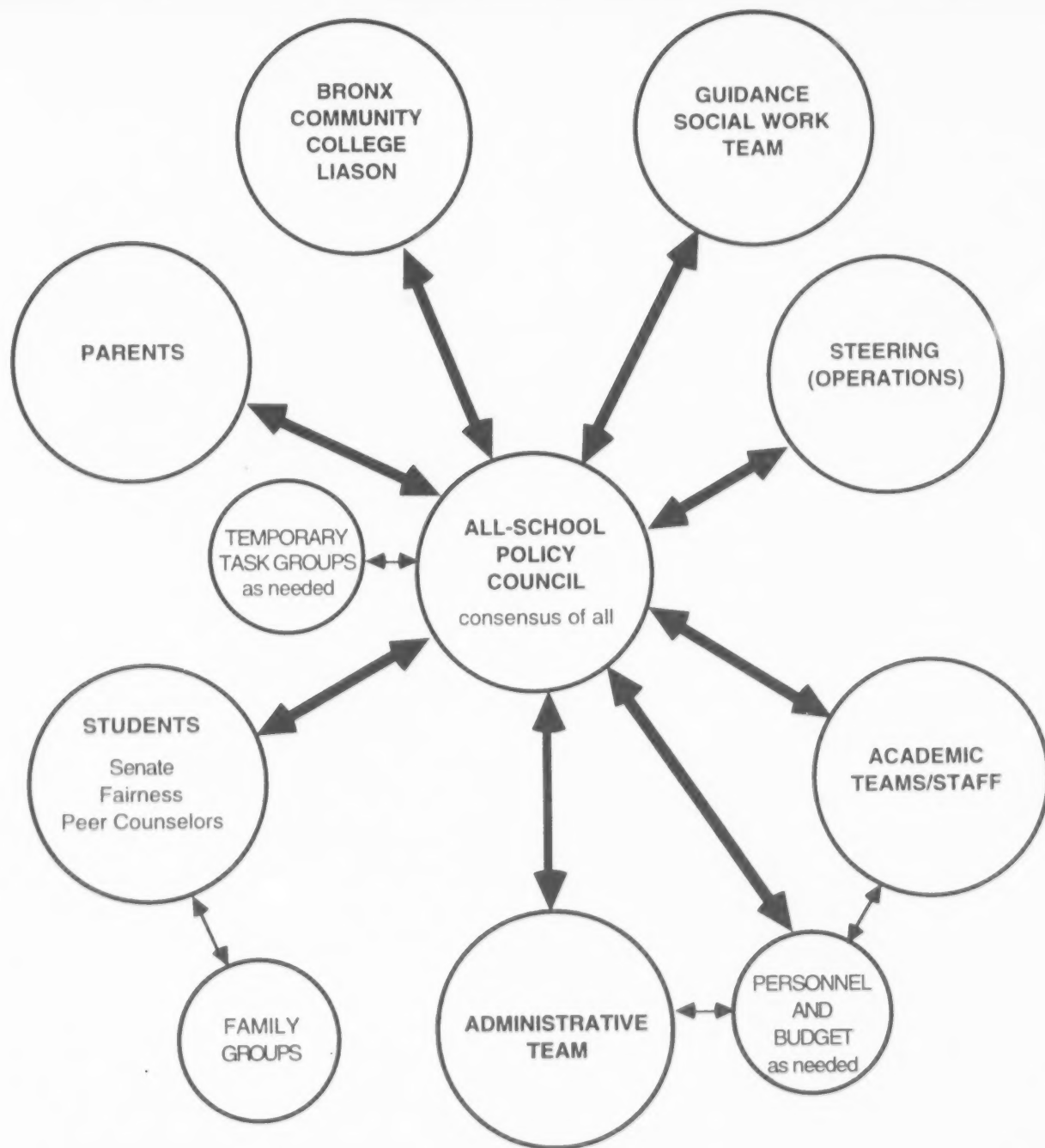


Figure 2. Decision Making at UHHS.

All decisions are made by consensus; everyone must be able to not just "live with," but support decisions made since we all are involved in their implementation. Issues may be raised at any place and any time and must be routed to appropriate venues, i.e., all groups that are directly affected by the decision to be made. Not every decision needs to go through the entire cycle; there is a responsibility to consult with all who *might* be interested. There is also a responsibility on the part of anyone who has an issue to raise it. Policy decisions are finalized at the Policy Council, which meets weekly.

voice and democratic participation, on teachers as professionals, and on adolescents as key players in school life means that personal standards take precedence over standardization. While "change takes time" is a cliché, UHHS understands that the time change takes translates into a "purposeful messiness" that is a bureaucrat's nightmare, but an absolute necessity when powerful adults and powerful young people come together to build something meaningful.

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